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Zhang Tianyi's Selective Acceptance of Charles Dickens

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

June 2019

Abstract

This research is a comparative study on the works of Charles Dickens (1812-1870) and Zhang Tianyi 張天翼 (1906-1985). The former was one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian era; the latter, a Left-wing writer in Republican China. The study analyses five short stories from Zhang's corpus and compares his works with ten novles of Dickens.

The study argues that Dickens is one among other writers that have parallels with Zhang, through the exploration of several aspects of their works. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Dickens's novels were introduced to China by Lin Shu. Since then, they have influenced a great number of Chinese scholars and writers.

First, considering the contents of Zhang's short stories, I roughly categorise them into five modes, respectively focusing on bureaucrats, villains, social climbers, revolutionary propa-ganda and wartime intellectuals. One short story of each type is analysed in detail. Second, this study explores both the similarities and the discrepancies between Zhang and Dickens's inner worlds and the projections of those worlds within their texts. I find that the two authors have much in common in their character portrayals, humour, language, children's perspectives and focus on social issues, whereas they differ considerably in what they hoped to achieve with their works, partly due to their different social settings, and this in turn gives their works very different qualities. Where Dickens believed in the goodness of human nature and hoped for gradual reform, Zhang Tianyi was a proponent of radical change and revolution.

This study expands the scope of the existing research on Zhang Tianyi, clarifies and establishes important factors in Zhang's literary development, and explores how Zhang imitated Dickens's artistic techniques and then creatively transformed them. Moreover, this study provides new perspectives and deepens existing studies. This investigation will thereby enable others to better understand Zhang's literary works, and will simultaneously help map Dickens's influence outside Britain.

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to my supervisor Dr Christopher Rosenmeier for his advice over the years.

I would like to thank my mother who paid my tuition fees and large part of living expenses. This project would not have been possible without her continued support. In addition, my father gave me lots of help and advice. I would also like to thank CAHSS for additional financial support in the last period of this research.

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Chapter I: Background

Introduction

During the New Culture Movement (1917-1927), the introduction of foreign literature greatly influenced Chinese literature. As Leo Ou-Fan Lee 李歐梵 argues:

“... foreign literature was used to bolster the new Chinese writer’s own image and lifestyle. With their own inflated egos and mania for hero-worship, these leading men of letters established a fetish of personal identification.....To be ‘a *la Mode*’ on the literary scene required that a literary man display not only his new poem or story but also his pantheon of foreign masters: Byron, Shelley, Keats, Goethe, Romain Rolland, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Hugo and Rousseau were among the favourites on almost everyone’s list.”¹

Charles Dickens was famous in the nineteenth century and his fame has not waned; in fact, his work remains known throughout the world. His works describe the lives of the lower classes of society and thus reveal the nuanced reality of the British Victorian era. In terms of technique, Dickens is famous for his wit and humour, linguistic creativity, detailed psychological enquiry and the combination of fantasy and realism.

Dickens’s novels were first introduced to China at the beginning of the twentieth century by Lin Shu 林紓(1852-1924), the prodigious late Qing translator who gained an epithet as the “King of translation” (yijie zhi wang 譯界之王). According to Lee, “There was hardly any May Fourth writer who did not first come into contact with Western literature through Lin’s translations.”² In “Writing at Chunjuezhai” (*Chunjuezhai zhushuji* 春覺齋著述記), Lin Shu states that he “had acquired the ability

¹ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, “Literary Trends I: The Quest for Modernity, 1895–1927” in John K. Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol.12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 490-491.

² *Ibid.*, 490.

to differentiate the nuances of one novel from another in the same way he grew accustomed to listening to the footsteps of his family members.”³ He translated Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Oliver Twist*, *Dombey and Son*, and *Nicholas Nickleby* into traditional Chinese prose, entitling them *Kuairou yusheng ji* 塊肉餘生記 (1908), *Xiaonü nai’er zhuan* 孝女耐爾傳 (1908), *Zeishi* 賊史 (1908), *Bingxue yinyuan* 冰雪姻緣 (1909), and *Huaji waishi* 滑稽外史 (1907), respectively. His translations grasped the essence of the originals and efficiently conveyed Dickens’s artistic charms. Through Lin’s translations, Dickens’s humorous and satirical style and depiction of characters influenced many Chinese writers and successfully helped Dickens become the literary idol of many Chinese readers at the time.⁴

Zhang Tianyi 張天翼 (1906-1985) was a distinctive satirist in Post-May Fourth Chinese literature. He stood out in the literary world at the end of the 1920s, and then rapidly became a star of the League of Left-Wing Writers (Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng 中國左翼作家聯盟). Zhang wrote an essay entitled “Autobiographical Sketch” (Zixu xiaozhuan 自敘小傳, 1936) in which he noted: “The authors who have influenced me most are Dickens, Maupassant, Zola, Barbusse, Lev Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, Lu Xun.”⁵ While several writers are mentioned on the list and specific influences are not mentioned, Dickens’s primary placement highlights his impact. Thus, it may be safely deduced that Zhang was aware of Dickens’s novels and seems to have held them in high regard. While this is not a direct influence study, it is worth exploring the parallels between Dickens and Zhang. In light of this connection, this study presents a comparative study of these two writers.

It is well known that Western literature was a major source of inspiration for Chinese writers in the Republican period. Yet there are few studies that actually try to compare the works between these authors in any detail. The notion of Western influence in general is very broad and vague, and this is an oversight in our understanding of how Chinese literature developed in this period. What particular

³ See Lin Shu’s preface to his translation of Charles Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

⁴ Tong Zhen 童真, *Dickens and China (Digengsi yu Zhongguo 狄更斯與中國)*, (Xiang Tan: Xiangtan daxue chubanshe, 2008).

⁵ Zhang Tianyi, “Autobiographical Sketch” (Zixu xiaozhuan 自敘小傳), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuangzuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 12.

aspects did Chinese writers adopt from Western literature and what did they reject? What external factors help explain these differences in transmission and selective adaptation? Comparative readings can help answer these questions.

Comparative literature is a sub-discipline in literary studies that frequently deals with the literature of two or more different languages. In recent years, some Chinese researchers have linked Zhang Tianyi to other authors; most of these studies are comparisons between his literary works and the works of his Chinese contemporaries. There have been very few research projects comparing his corpus with the works of foreign authors. Indeed, there is very little research in general on Zhang, especially considering that he is a reasonably well-known author. Since a 1986 Chinese symposium on this work, academic interest in Zhang has waned, with less than three relevant articles being produced in China every year.⁶ There is barely anything in English. Thus, there is a great necessity for further study on Zhang Tianyi, as there are few studies on this topic equivalent to those of Zhang Ailing 張愛玲, Shen Cong-wen 沈從文 and Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書, all of whom were emphasised by C.T. Hsia (1961).

No significant research has examined the connections of Dickens and Zhang. The primary aim of this research is to compare the literary creation of Zhang and Dickens. More specifically, through comprehensive analysis of these two writers and their literary works, this study will explore the motivations of the two writers in question and projections in their works, as well as the reasons behind such projections. More broadly, I hope to show that a detailed comparative study, such as this one, is a viable method in analysing the works of such Chinese authors. As mentioned, many Republican Chinese writers and intellectuals were deeply influenced by English and other foreign literature, but this is rarely explored in any detail. The comparative method enables us to take another step in understanding these works and the intricate relationships between them.

To this end, I plan to study some of the lesser-known works by Zhang since some of them are unique in his works and I will mainly use comparison as a means of

⁶ Yang Chunfeng 楊春風, "A Review and Introspection of the Last Twenty Years of Zhang Tianyi Study" (Jin er'shi nian Zhang Tianyi yanjiu de huigu yu fansi 近二十年張天翼研究的回顧與反思), *Shangqiu shifan xueyuan xuebao* vol.26, no.2 (2010): 37

achieving my goals. This study will research the inner world of Zhang and Dickens; it will help to expand the scope of the existing investigations into Zhang by establishing and clarifying key important factors in Zhang's literary development. It will explore Zhang's imitation of and deviation from Dickens's artistic thoughts. It may, therefore, enable academia to achieve a better understanding of the characteristics of Zhang's fiction. It will also help to track Dickens's impact upon nations other than Britain.

Structure Overview

In the rest of this chapter, there will be literature review and research methodology. Also, the translations of Dickens's fiction in late Qing and Republican China will be introduced, since most Chinese people encountered Dickens through translations. I will then try to find reasons for Zhang Tianyi adopting Dickens: Zhang's childhood, the development of his individual temperament and the formation and transformation of his literary characteristics.

In Chapter II, I will elaborate on the similarities between Dickens and Zhang in six aspects: "Character comes first" (Renwu diyi 人物第一); choosing a topic; character building techniques; humo-rous and satirical writing style; children's perspectives, and language.

Chapter III discusses the discrepancies between Zhang Tianyi and Dickens; they will be categorised into four points: the degree of their criticism of the social system; their attitude towards social revolution; their opinions on artistry, and their attitudes towards life.

In Chapter IV, in order to capture Zhang's creative characteristics and figure out his unique contribution to modern Chinese literature, I roughly categorise Zhang Tianyi's short stories into five modes: The grey life of petty bureaucrats, the bourgeoisie and intellectuals; the villainy of warlords, landlords, local tyrants, evil gentry, money lenders and capitalists; social climbers; revolutionary propaganda and wartime intellectuals. I will analyse five works, one corresponding to each type. This chapter is the basis for an overview of Zhang's works in terms of themes and character building techniques. Then there will be the conclusion.

Literature Review

Zhang Tianyi is one of the most important writers in Chinese New Literature. The majority of his works were published between 1929 and 1938. They include 84 short stories that were collected in twelve short story collections respectively entitled: *From Emptiness to Fullness* (*Cong kongxu dao chongshi* 從空虛到充實, 1931), *Little Peter* (*Xiao Bide* 小彼得, 1931), *Bees* (*Mifeng* 蜜蜂, 1933), *Counter-attack* (*Fangong* 反攻, 1934), *Moving On* (*Yihang* 移行, 1934), *Reunion* (*Tuanyuan* 團圓, 1935), *Wan Renyue* 萬仞約, 1936, *Chase* (*Zhui* 追, 1936), *Spring Breeze* (*Chunfeng* 春風, 1936), *Collection of an Odd person* (*Ji renji* 畸人集, 1936), *Fellow Villagers* (*Tongxiang men* 同鄉們, 1939), *Three Sketches* (*Suxie Sanpian* 速寫三篇, 1943), and one novella entitled “Season of Tomb Sweeping” (*Qingming shijie* 清明時節, 1954). He wrote five novels respectively entitled: *Ghostland Diary* (*Guitu riji* 鬼土日記, 1931), *The Cogwheel* (*Chilun* 齒輪, 1932), *A Year* (*Yinian* 一年, 1933), *The Strange Knight of Shanghai* (*Yangjing bang qixia* 洋涇浜奇俠, 1936), and *In the City* (*Zai chengshi li* 在城市裡, 1937). Besides, he created several humorous and funny fairy tales for children: *Big Lin and Small Lin* (*Dalin yu xiaolin* 大林與小林, 1932), *The King of the Bald* (*Tutu dawang* 禿禿大王, 1933), and *The Empire of Golden Ducks* (*Jinya diguo* 金鴨帝國, 1942).

In most of his works, Zhang adopts wild exaggeration and sarcastic humour. Accordingly, he has been praised by Wu Fuhui 吳福輝 as a “fully deserving genius of the art of comedy in the 1930s”⁷ and “one of two gems, together with Lao She 老舍, in the field of Republican Chinese satirical novels since Lu Xun 魯迅”⁸.

His works are so abundant—covering novels, essays, fairy tales, drama, poetry, reviews and allegory—they reach a staggering total of approximately 3.8 million

⁷ Yang Yi 楊義, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* vol.2 (*Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo shi* 中國現代小說史) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1986), 377.

⁸ Wu Fuhui 吳福輝, “Sharp. Fresh. Exaggerated—On the characters and description skills of Zhang Tianyi’s satirical novels” (Fengli. xinxi. kuazhang—shilun Zhang Tianyi fengci xiaoshuo de renwu jiqi miaoxie yishu 鋒利. 新鮮. 誇張——試論張天翼諷刺小說的人物及其描寫藝術), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 377.

characters. Over the years, scholars have developed some works on his texts and artistic features, and a few have worked on comparing his works with works of other writers. In China, there are three periods in Zhang Tianyi studies: early (1922 to 1948); middle (1950 to 1960) and late (1978 to present). The following section will discuss these three periods before looking at overseas research on Zhang Tianyi.

1. Criticism of Zhang Tianyi by Contemporaries (1923 to 1948)

The history of Zhang Tianyi criticism began in 1923 with Zhu Yi's 朱玃 work in the journal *Half-moon* (*Banyue* 半月).⁹ This paper critiqued the detective stories written by Zhang Tianyi in the very early period of his writing career. There was a gap between 1923 and 1930 and in this time, Zhang did not receive much attention. However, this changed following the publication of Zhang's semi-autobiographical story "A Three and a Half Day's Dream" (*Santian bande meng* 三天半的夢), published in *Currents* (*Benliu* 奔流, a famous journal of the League of Left-Wing Writers) on April 24, 1929.¹⁰ Zhang aroused the attention of many scholars, such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun 茅盾, Hu Feng 胡風, Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, and others. These scholars all wrote review articles about him and his publications, ensuring his recognition as a well-known author. Lu Xun even hailed Zhang as one of the best writers since the modern literary movement began, stating that he was as good as Mao Dun, Ding Ling 丁玲, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Yu Dafu 郁達夫, Shen Congwen and Tian Jun 田軍.¹¹

In 1931, Zhang Tianyi's first novel, the satirical *Ghostland Diary*, was reviewed by Tian Yuan 天猿, Qu Qiubai and Feng Naichao 馮乃超. They all argued that the ghostly world he created was untruthful. This novel will be taken as an example in chapter II section I to support the argument of "Character Comes First". Feng Naichao also talked about the features of language, theme and protagonists of his

⁹ Shen Chengkuan 沈成寬 et al. eds. *Research Materials on Zhang Tianyi* (*Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* 張天翼研究資料) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Edgar Snow, "a conversation with Edgar Snow" in Edgar Snow, ed. *Living China: Modern Chinese Short Stories* (London: George G. Harrap Co. Ltd, 1936), 347.

short stories¹², which relates to chapter II section II and VI. In a letter to Zhang, Lu Xun pointed out that his work “was sometimes too jocular, but it is turning towards realism”.¹³ In the same year, Mao Dun argued that *The Cogwheel* failed to point out the positive meanings of the youth students’ movement after the “Mukden Incident” (9.18,1937), although that should surely be its primary task. This failure makes the subject lose its meaning. Mao Dun also criticised the loose structure of *The Cogwheel* and what he considered to be the unsuccessful portrayal of its characters, which is a good support for the argument of “Character Description Skills” in chapter II. Zhang often emphasised the external features of the characters and repeated their characteristics time after time. This technique can help create an impression on readers, but it can also lead to ignoring the psychological complexity of the characters, which in turn leads to a failure of characterization according to Shen Wu 慎吾.¹⁴ This is the main point of “Character Description Skills”. In 1934, Wang Shuming 王淑明, a League of Left-Wing Writers critic, argued that *The Strange Knight of Shanghai* was influenced by *Don Quixote* by using the comparative method.¹⁵ Hu Shengzu 胡繩祖 commented that the *The Strange Knight of Shanghai* is a failed work due to the novel being full of unctuously laughing stereotypical characters, but he then praised Zhang’s prodigious talent for humour when analyzing the nine short stories in *Migration*.¹⁶

In 1935, Hu Feng published a long essay titled “On Zhang Tianyi” (Zhang Tianyi lun 張天翼論), systematically demonstrating the creative features of Zhang Tianyi’s works.¹⁷ This essay contains many aspects that will be elaborated in chapter II including “Character Comes First”, “Character Description Skills” and “Language”. To begin with, Hu Feng acknowledged that Zhang creates something new which separates him from other authors. Moreover, he did not believe that the wealthy, local tyrants and evil gentry which Zhang described truly depicted the reality of Republican China. He remarked that nearly all the characters in Zhang’s works are

¹² Shen Chengkuan 沈成寬 et al. eds. *Research Materials on Zhang Tianyi (Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao 張天翼研究資料)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 228-230.

¹³ Lu Xun, “A Letter to Zhang Tianyi from Lu Xun” (Lu Xun zhi Zhang Tianyi 魯迅致張天翼), 1st February 1933, in Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981, no.12), 144.

¹⁴ Shen Chengkuan 沈成寬 et al. eds. *Research Materials on Zhang Tianyi (Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao 張天翼研究資料)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 243.

¹⁵ Ibid., 246.

¹⁶ Ibid., 251.

¹⁷ Ibid., 269-296.

extremely simple, lacking depth, authenticity and psychological development. Hu Feng believed that the prototypes of these characters were far more complicated than those created by Zhang. Hu Feng also found that Zhang likes to alienate the readers by adding some repulsive scenes to promote the development of the plot, such as in “Hate” and “Migration”, etc. He also noted that Zhang seems deliberately to keep himself at a distance from the characters he creates. He mocks and plays with them, with an indifferent attitude, rather than profoundly dissecting them. It is this distance, Hu Feng contended, which makes his characters seem unreal. Hu Feng discussed the caricature and concise oral language of Zhang’s fiction. Finally, Hu Feng praised the realistic concepts of Zhang and hoped that he would take out the supposedly misconceived humour so as to create more realistic works.

Other scholars also commented on the supposedly indifferent attitude of Zhang Tianyi towards the objects of his works. Zhang often adopts a mocking attitude towards his characters, which damages the overall artistic effect according to Wang Hua 汪華.¹⁸ By comparing Zhang’s writings with those of Lu Xun, Wang Hua finds that what Lu Xun satirises is the unfairness of society, rather than the meaningless, individual trivialities that Zhang focuses on. He also mentions the children’s literature written by Zhang and evaluates “Bees” as a masterpiece, and his criticism inspires my analysis of Zhang’s perspectives of children in chapter II. Gu Zhongyi 顧仲彝 criticises Zhang for focusing only on ugly aspects of human nature and suggests that a great novel needs great characters.¹⁹ Zhang’s focus on ugly will be analysed in “Pessimism and Optimism” of chapter III.

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident initiated the full-scale Sino-Japanese war in July 1937. Nine months later, “Mr. Hua Wei” (Hua Wei xiansheng 華威先生) was first published in *Literary Battle Formation* (*Wenyi zhendi* 文藝陣地), a comprehensive and voluminous literary periodical edited by Mao Dun during the War of Resistance Against Japan, on April 16, 1938.²⁰ The short story proceeded to stir up a heated debate. The eponymous Mr. Hua Wei is an official who is busy with meetings, speeches and dining during the war. He tries to put all things under his control, and

¹⁸ Ibid., 297.

¹⁹ Ibid., 263.

²⁰ Ibid., 513.

cares for nothing but his political power. This short story had such a considerable impact that it was introduced to Japan as representative of Chinese officials in the war.²¹ Some critics claimed that this short story revealed the intense pessimism of Zhang Tianyi or asserted that it would result in a boost to Japanese morale and a reduction in Chinese national courage.²² However, Mao Dun made the opposite argument: he believed that “Mr. Hua Wei” pays close attention to evil hiding in the light and this emphasis is more important than merely celebrating the light (Mao Dun, 1938). Zhang sensitively created this stereotype at the beginning of the war, when there were still many people like Mr. Hua Wei living in China. The text served to expose the dark side of reality and is as worthwhile as prasing the light (Zhou Xing 周行, 1939); unqualified praise is not always constructive (Wu Zuxiang 吳組緇, 1940). This debate was so prolonged that by the end of 1944, there were still some people who claimed that China was still living in the age of Mr. Hua Wei (Jiang Xingyu 蔣星煜, 1944).

After *Three Sketches* (a short story collection, 1943), Zhang Tianyi almost abandoned writing fiction due to serious illness.²³ Many people and periodical offices composed articles appealing to help him. Thus, the critical papers about Zhang were accordingly reduced between 1943 to 1950.²⁴

Actually, the vast majority of Zhang’s works were produced from 1929 to 1938 – from “A Three and a Half Day’s Dream” (Santian bande meng 三天半的夢 1929, April) to “New Life” (Xinsheng 新生 1938, November). Between these dates, he wrote 84 short stories, one novella, five novels, two plays and two fairy tales. In the autumn of 1942, Zhang was affected with serious pulmonary tuberculosis, which forced him stop writing for quite a long time. When recovered from his illness, around the time of the foundation of the PRC, Zhang devoted the rest of his life to children’s literature under the new regime. Thus, the study of Zhang’s adult works is mainly relevant to his fiction from 1929 to 1938.

²¹ Ibid., 310.

²² Ibid., 310, 311.

²³ Ibid., 32-45.

²⁴ Ibid., 544, 545.

The studies of Zhang Tianyi in the Republican period are colourful. Many people, including some famous writers, offered commentaries on Zhang. In these comments, there were positive reviews as well as negative criticism. Compared to the relatively one-sided praise in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the judgments of Zhang in this period were more diverse. There was less government control of the media than in the PRC. However, during this stage, most of the critics linked Zhang to China and Chinese authors, rarely to other countries and foreign authors. This is due to the fact that Chinese people paid more attention to their own country during the war era; they consciously associated literature with the reality of China, rather than the world at large. They did not have enough time or energy to forge connections between Zhang and the world beyond China.

In addition, they seldom remarked upon Zhang's fairy tales; only one paper titled "Zhang Tianyi's Soldier Stories and Fairy Tales" (Zhang Tianyi de bingshi xiaoshuo he tonghua 張天翼的兵士小說和童話) particularly discusses it (Liang Xinqiao 梁新橋, 1932). This may be assumed to be a result of the war. A demotivated population ignored Zhang's fairy tales, viewed as mainly written for children.

2. The Studies of Zhang Tianyi in the Early Period of the PRC (1950 to 1960)

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Zhang Tianyi studies entered a different stage. In this period, the study of literature was strictly controlled by political ideology. Thus Zhang Tianyi studies in this time are distinctly nuanced.

Zhang Tianyi was not mentioned in academic articles from the end of 1948 until 1950. In a book entitled *Initial Literature* (*Wenxue chubu* 文學初步), Ba Ren 巴人 (1950) compares "Mr. Hua Wei" with "Less than half of a truckload of wheat straw" (*Cha banche maijie* 差半車麥秸) by Yao Xueyin 姚雪垠 (1938), both of which were successful short stories during the war. He supposes that Zhang creates Mr. Hua Wei as a typical image but he does not mention the typical environment around

him.²⁵

Zhang Tianyi returned to Beijing from Macao in May 1950 after his health improved. He then gave some talks to young people, which were subsequently reviewed in journals.²⁶ After that, a series of histories of New Chinese literature were successively published, compiled by both individuals and the Departments of Chinese at various universities. In sections dedicated to Zhang Tianyi, they summarise the previous criticism of Zhang and selectively introduce parts of his short stories. Nearly all of them evaluate Zhang as one of the most important writers in Republican Chinese literary history, as well as a pioneer in children's literature.²⁷

There were some scholars who additionally discussed "Mr. Hua Wei". Their arguments looked similar to those made during the Republican period. However, they consciously determine the identity of Mr. Hua Wei as a dirty politician of the Nationalist Party. They assert that Mr. Hua Wei completely matches the nonresistance policy of the Nationalist Party and further claim that Mr. Hua Wei is a representative of the obstruction which characterised the Nationalist Party during the Second Sino-Japanese war. From this perspective, we can easily see how ideology influenced literary criticism in the PRC.

Besides, the advent of the studies of children literature opened up the possibility for a critical approach to Zhang Tianyi's fairy tales. Jiang Feng 蔣風 (1959) points out that Zhang inherited the concept of realistic children's literature from Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶 and then created a vast number of fairy tales. Jiang argues that *Big Lin and Small Lin* paves the way for Chinese children's literature through its original creativity and practical significance.²⁸

Soon after the founding of the PRC, there was little research that paid attention to Zhang Tianyi. Only a few publications were focused on his work; others were literary histories of Republican China that just mentioned him in passing. Additionally, the

²⁵ Ibid., 331.

²⁶ Ibid., 546.

²⁷ Ibid., 332-340.

²⁸ Ibid., 349-358.

research methods and methodologies of these studies on Zhang Tianyi were very narrow. Most researchers used a Marxist framework to conduct their research. At the same time, western academic departments had begun to use various methods of critical analysis such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, historicism, new criticism, etc. The diversified methods developed a canon of western literary criticism with which Chinese literary criticism can hardly compete. This phenomenon may also be attributed to the obvious political overtones in China's literary criticism.

3. The studies of Zhang Tianyi in the Period of PRC (1978 to present)

There was a huge gap in studies of Zhang Tianyi from 1961 to 1977 in mainland China. During these 17 years, no relevant articles were published. During this stage, there were a few publications relevant to Zhang that were released in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Most of them are general introductions to Republican Chinese literature or Chinese writers.²⁹

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Zhang Tianyi studies entered a new age. Enthusiasm for studying Zhang Tianyi and his literary works was reinvigorated by the reprinting of the *Collection of Zhang Tianyi's Fiction* (*Zhang Tianyi xiaoshuo xuanji* 張天翼小說選集) in June 1979. Following this, five selected works of Zhang Tianyi were published. For five to six years, from the beginning of the 1980s to the 80th anniversary of Zhang's birth, there was a surge of interest in Zhang, as Yang Chunfeng 楊春風 summarises:

“One year after his death in 1986, a symposium about his literature was held in Beijing; papers presented in that symposium were published in a book entitled *On Zhang Tianyi* (*Zhang Tianyi lun* 張天翼論) and a plan to publish a series of books entitled *Collected Works of Zhang Tianyi* (*Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集) with ten volumes was devised. However, subsequently, this enthusiasm cooled down rapidly. The publication of the ten volumes of *Collected Works of Zhang Tianyi* was delayed and finished ten years after the symposium in July 1993.

²⁹ Ibid., 428-438.

Most senior researchers and experts left the field of study after the symposium and left the tasks to successors who were unknown and new to the field, as if they had an agreement. For twenty years, no meetings similar to the symposium have been held except to commemorate the centenary of Zhang's birth in 2006, when a symposium was held jointly by the Children's Literature Committee of the Chinese Writers Association and the Chinese Children Literature Research Center of Beijing Normal University. This symposium only discussed Zhang's literary works for children and avoided novel studies. Since the symposium, studies of Zhang and his literary works have been at a low ebb with less than three relevant publications every year."³⁰

So far, for more than ninety years, there have been only three Chinese monographs on Zhang Tianyi. They are *Draft of Discussion on Zhang Tianyi's Fiction* (*Zhang Tianyi xiaoshuo lungao* 張天翼小說論稿, 1985) by Du Yuanming 杜元明, *Zhang Tianyi's Literary Path* (*Zhang Tianyi de wenxue daolu* 張天翼的文學道路, 1993) by Huang Houxing 黃侯興 and *Commentary Biography of Zhang Tianyi* (*Zhang Tianyi pingzhuan* 張天翼評傳, 2001) by Zhang Jinyi 張錦貽. This does not reflect the abundant creations of Zhang Tianyi. Zhang Tianyi studies are far fewer than the studies of other Republican Chinese authors such as Shen Congwen, Qian Zhongshu, Zhang Ailing, Ba Jin 巴金, Lao She, Cao Yu 曹禺, Sha Ting, Ding Ling, etc.

Through a complete collection survey of the past 36 years of studies on Zhang Tianyi and his literary products, it may be understood that there are some distinct weaknesses within the scholarship.

(1) The studies are far from comprehensive

Scholars have paid more attention to Zhang Tianyi's most important works than his less famous output. Published studies only focus on a few major works. For instance, many studies have been published about Zhang's most famous work "Mr.

³⁰ Yang Chunfeng 楊春風, "A review and introspection of the last twenty years of Zhang Tianyi study" (Jin er'shi nian Zhang Tianyi yanjiu de huigu yu fansi 近二十年張天翼研究的回顧與反思), *Shangqiu shifan xueyuan xuebao* 26, no.2 (2010): 37

Hua Wei". These include Yao Zheng's 姚爭 (1994) "Investigations of Hua Wei's New Images", Xu Yuanrong's 徐元容 (1996) "Deep Meanings and Far-reaching Purposes – Rereading Mr. Hua Wei", He Xuan's 何軒 (2005) "Construction of Authorities and Overthrow of Subjects – Explanations of Zhang Tianyi's 'Mr. Hua Wei'", etc. In these articles, the authors all agree that Mr. Hua Wei was a corrupt politician who greedily increased his authority under the shadow of the Sino-Japanese war. This image encompassed all the inherent weaknesses of the nation like vanity, selfishness and negativity. They state that it was a derivative of the image of Ah Q 阿 Q, the main character in Lu Xun's novella "The True Story of Ah Q" (A Q zhengzhuan 阿 Q 正傳). Regarding Zhang's "Bao Father and Son" (Baoshi fuzi 包氏父子), there are research papers such as Shi Chengjun's 史承鈞 (1991) "Superb Art of Satire for Upsetting Social Illness – Reading Zhang Tianyi's 'Bao Father and Son'", Zhang Huiling's 張惠玲 (1998) "Reflections Inspired by Old Bao in 'Bao Father and Son'", etc. In addition, "The Bulwark" (Dizhu 砥柱) and "Diary of an Abnormal Man" (Jiren shouji 畸人手記) were also discussed.

As for Zhang Tianyi's novels, there were articles like Hu Congjing's 胡從經 (1986) "A Unique Ghost Story – Zhang Tianyi's *Ghostland Diary*", Zhou Yanjiu's 譚言九 (1991) "The New Left-Wing Writer Zhang Tianyi and his *A Year*", Ma Bing's 馬兵 (2004) "Four Adventure Novels in the History of New Literature", etc. All of these papers acknowledge the artistic value of the novels mentioned above, and evaluate them as a link in the long chain of Republican Chinese satirical literature. These novels are worthy of critical attention. Indeed, as the first satirical works of Chinese left-wing literature, they deserve further analysis and exploration.

However, except for the well-known short stories and novels mentioned above, few researchers have paid attention to the remaining works. The amount of these ignored works is huge: if we disregard the children's literature from Zhang Tianyi's canon, there are still about one hundred works. Even apart from what C.T. Hsia called "roughly a third of his stories as standard proletarian exercises in the manner

of Socialist Realism”³¹, the remaining bulk (approximately seventy works) all testify to his high level of output. However, as current literature largely focuses only on six works of his abundant corpus, there is clearly a major gap in Zhang Tianyi studies.

(2) Research methodologies still lack variety

Some researchers have discussed the artistic characteristics of Zhang Tianyi’s literary products from the perspectives of character development, theme, linguistic features, and most frequently, his humorous and satirical style of writing. When it comes to Zhang’s personality, people often mention his sense of humour and sarcasm. This is because that sarcasm really is the common feature of the majority of his literary works; furthermore, it is, also the main form of his artistic style. In recent years, many research papers have summarised his humour and satire as a whole, for example: Chen Wenzhong’s 陳文仲 (1988) “Zhang Tianyi and His Satirical Works”; Huang Houxing’s (1988) “A Deepening of Realism – Evolution of Zhang Tianyi’s Novel Creation”; Zhu Tianyin’s 諸天寅 (1988) “Zhang Tianyi’s Cartoon Style Satire – Starting from ‘The Bulwark’” and Wang Jie’s 王杰 (1989) “First Investigations of Zhang Tianyi’s Satirical Novel Skills”. In a paper titled “Investigations of the Cartoon Style Satirical Techniques in Zhang Tianyi’s Early Short Stories and Their Evolution” (1995), Liao Jiuyi 廖久意 acknowledged the transition from craftiness to sarcasm in the cartoon style for creating characters in Zhang’s work. His cartoon style satirical art evolved from being simply rough and clear to meticulous and far-reaching. His satire has transformed from slightly comical jokes and flirtations to euphemistic sarcasm. This development is closely integrated with realistic art approaches and endeavored to create images full of personality whilst making artistic conclusions on complicated social lives. In “Research of the Modern Features of Zhang Tianyi’s Satirical Novels” (2001), Chen Mingbin 陳明彬 and Fu Jinyan 付金艷 provide a number of observations. They believe that Zhang, operating during the historical transition of Republican Chinese satirical novels from traditional literature to New Literature, enriched the connotations of the literary forms of such novels but also made undeniable contributions to the modernization process of Chinese satirical novel styles, through the use of modern approaches including third person narrative,

³¹ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 214.

children's perspectives, non-plot and colloquial narration.

In addition, papers like Chen Caixia's 陳彩霞 (1999) "Strong Contrast and Cartoon Style Exaggeration – Studies of the Satirical Art of Zhang Tianyi's Novellas Starting from 'Bao Father and Son' and 'Mr. Hua Wei'", Lai Zhiming's 賴志明 (2000) "Simple · Exaggerated · Humorous – Looking at the Characteristics of the Satirical Art of Zhang Tianyi's Short Stories 'Bao Father and Son' and 'Mr. Hua Wei'", and a few other articles also drew conclusions on Zhang's satirical art by studying his representative fictional output. In a doctoral thesis entitled "On Zhang Tianyi's Satirical Novels", Yang Chunfeng (2010) summarises the general satirical skills of Zhang and systemically introduces the development of his satire, theme, artistic styles and the reasons behind such developments.

However, the research methodologies of all of these studies of Zhang Tianyi still lack diversity. At present, western literary theory is rarely deployed when studying Zhang's works. Most of these articles situate the content of his works within their societal context or within the context of Zhang's own life. Compared to the studies of other Republican Chinese writers, the studies of Zhang distinctly lack new perspectives.

(3) Comparative studies lack depth

Zhang Tianyi grew up in an era when three spiritual tides prevailed at the same time: Chinese traditional literature, western literature and May Fourth literature. It can be concluded that his literary creations were bound to be influenced by masterpieces both at home and abroad. Many researchers used the comparative method to study Zhang's literary works. In particular, there have been comparisons made between his fictional output and the literary products of his contemporaries, such as Liu Qinghua 劉清華 and Peng Caiyun's 彭彩雲 (1992) "The Era of Lu Xun and Zhang Tianyi and the Relevance of the Comic Figures in Their Novels in History", Li Wan's 李菀 (1996) "Exploration of the Satirical Art of Zhang Tianyi and Qian Zhongshu", Lou Zhagen's 婁扎根 (1996) "Public Images: Differences and Similarities between Lao She and Zhang Tianyi", Lu Feng's 盧風 (1998) "The Broadness of the Road of Realistic

Creation and the Uniqueness of the Art of Writers – Comparison of Novels of Ye Shengtao, Shen Congwen, and Zhang Tianyi”, Pei Deli’s 裴德利 (2002) “Satirical Novels under Culture Psychology of War – Brief Analysis of Satirical Novels of Sha Ting and Zhang Tianyi”, Wang Xiyang’s 王希穎 (2004) “Looking at Life with Tears and Joy – A Comparison of the Writing Styles of Zhang Tianyi’s and Jiang Muliang’s Satirical Novels”, Xu Yanli’s 徐艷莉 (2007) “Deep Investigations of the Souls of the Citizens – Attempts to Compare the Figures in Lao She’s and Zhang Tianyi’s Novels” and Zhang Haisheng’s 張海生 (2008) “Zhang Tianyi: An Exclusive Successor Writer to Lu Xun”.

All of the comparisons mentioned above are macroscopic studies of Zhang and other writers. There have also been comparisons between Zhang’s most famous works and those of other writers, for example, Liu Xipu’s 劉西普 (1989) “Hiding Sarcasm in Subtle Realism – Satirical Art of ‘Soap’ and ‘The Bulwark’”, Wang Keyong’s 王克勇 (1999) “Playing the Same Tune on Different Musical Instruments – Evaluations of the Satirical Art Styles of ‘Mr. Hua Wei’, ‘At Qi Xiang Ju Teahouse’, ‘Besieged City’”, etc. Furthermore, comparisons have been made between Zhang’s work and traditional literature; for instance, Wang Xianglin’s 王祥林 (2008) “Comparison of Xia Zong Jia and Mr. Hua Wei”. In this article, the author points out Zhang’s inheritance of the character descriptions and satirical techniques from the late Qing novel *The Scholars* (Rulin waishi 儒林外史).

There have been a few articles which have compared Zhang Tianyi’s literary works with foreign writers’ works. These include Tong Zhen 童真 and Hu Baohua’s 胡葆華 (2008) short article “Zhang Tianyi and Dickens”, in which the authors elaborate upon Dickens’s influence on Zhang’s opinions on novel writing, character development and satire. They assert that Zhang surpassed Dickens because he grounded his work on China’s social reality and well-developed national literature. Zhang Jinjun’s 張晉軍 (2011) “Dickens: The Cornerstone of Zhang Tianyi’s Literature – On Zhang Tianyi’s Acceptance of Dickens” adds the use of children’s perspective as an argument. These two articles are important to my thesis, as the main body of this study (chapter II) inspired by them. In addition, Luo Jing’s 羅京 (1997) “A

Comparison of 'The Sleeved Person' and 'Mr. Hua Wei'", Hu Qiang's 胡強 (2003) "Creative Receiving Subject – On Oversea Influences upon Zhang Tianyi's works" and Zhang Jinjun's (2007) "Attempts to Evaluate Gogol's and Chekhov's Influences on Zhang Tianyi in His Satirical Novel Creation" all discuss Zhang's adoption of creative thoughts, skills on choosing a theme, and satirical techniques from foreign literature, and how he transformed them into his own texts. These studies contribute to my comparative study by offering the comparative perspective. And by the way, nothing of this sort exists in English.

Comparing Zhang Tianyi with his contemporaries can help highlight his speciality, advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, comparing him with foreign writers can elucidate his literary origins and the mechanisms of inheritance and transformation, whereas the comparison of writers' works can be ambiguous. They tend to search for similarities and differences in artistic aspect, rather than seeking to examine the ways in which the writers' creative levels intersect.

4. Zhang Tianyi Studies Overseas

In 1961, C.T. Hsia published *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, which remained the most important literary history of Republican China for many years in English. In this book, C.T. Hsia evaluates Zhang as "the most brilliant short-story writer of the decade"³² from a purely artistic perspective. He also points out that "of his contemporaries, only Shen Ts'eng-wen 沈從文 closely matches him for the quality and quantity of his short stories, but Shen lacks his biting power and savage wit."³³ These comments were unprecedented praise for Zhang Tianyi, which aroused the attention of some foreign scholars.

Subsequently, a doctoral thesis in English entitled "Zhang Tianyi's Fiction: The Beginning of Proletarian Literature in China" was written by Tsau Shu-ying in 1976 at the University of Toronto. In this thesis, Tsau proposes that Zhang's basis for evaluating his wide range of characters is not human nature but class nature. In

³² C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 212.

³³ Ibid., 214.

most of his stories, cruelty is presented as a characteristic of landlords, loan sharks, industrialists and military officers rather than as a basic tenet of humankind. This opinion is opposed to C.T. Hsia's comment that Zhang "transcends the propagandist level to arrive at an ironic revelation of the basic human abjectness and cruelty".³⁴ Tsau also posits that the value of Zhang's fiction come from the expression of a proletarian view of class struggle in artistic form, and Zhang's allegiance to the proletariat and the organisation for proletarian literature was a condition for the successful development of his art, rather than a limitation. This is an important study that will be quoted several times in later chapters.

In 1990, Marston Anderson published *The Limits of Realism*, which uses "realism" to interrogate Republican Chinese fiction. In one chapter of this book, Anderson introduces Zhang Tianyi and his works from a realistic perspective and quotes several descriptions of the devices of realist fiction by Zhang. Anderson goes on to cite few critiques of Zhang in the Republican period, and introduces several of his works such as "The Sorrows of Pig Guts" (Zhuchangzi de bei'ai 豬腸子的悲哀), "Mr. Jing Ye" (Jing Ye xiansheng 荊野先生), "Cogwheel", "The Bulwark", *A Year* and *In the City*. Most of these engagements are general plot summaries followed by some analysis. He writes, "Both Mao Dun and Zhang Tianyi grounded their fictional projects in a refusal to engage in May Fourth introspection; both stubbornly turned their gaze away from the self toward society...they shared understanding of society as an arena of conflict where historical contradictions play themselves out."³⁵ He then explains why their fiction show markedly different styles and forms. Finally, Anderson endorses that "the capacity of fiction not simply to reflect the times in which they lived, but actively to propel the wheels of history",³⁶ which confers high praise upon the works of Chinese realists like Mao and Zhang.

Hitherto, only one monograph about Zhang Tianyi has been published in English, namely Sun Yifeng's 孫藝風 *Fragmentation and Dramatic Moments: Zhang Tianyi and the Narrative Discourse of Upheaval in Modern China* (2002). Sun collates a

³⁴ Ibid., 213.

³⁵ Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (California: University of California Press, 1990), 177.

³⁶ Ibid., 179.

systematic study on Zhang's life and works. He starts with the biography of Zhang and a summary of Zhang's fiction. Sun then writes about realism and the Republican Chinese acceptance of realism, whilst praising Zhang's distinctive art of realism. Chapter Four details Zhang's writing features with Sun arguing that Zhang chose satire as a "powerful weapon with which he could comment on social reality".³⁷ The next chapter talks about Zhang's literary language, which had rarely been elaborated upon by scholars previously. Sun points out that "through his ingenious use of literary language, Zhang Tianyi creates and perpetuates some of his most memorable characters."³⁸ Sun thenceforth discusses on the recurrent fragmentation in Zhang's art of narrative, and the function of this repetition. Finally, Sun suggests that Zhang's predilection for fragmentation means that his work offers multiple interpretations. Indeed, "by fragmenting the narrative, the author leaves himself little space to tell the reader exactly how a certain scene or a whole story is to be comprehended. This leaves critics therefore with the task of bridging all the narrative gaps".³⁹ This argument had never been made within Zhang Tianyi studies before, thus it is fairly valuable and precious.

Overall, foreign studies into Zhang Tianyi remain thin on the ground; only approximately ten publications exist so far, most of which do not focus directly on Zhang. Actually, this lack of interest from international critics may partly be due to the inadequacy in the scholarship on Zhang in Chinese. Yet when comparing with the studies of Zhang in mainland China, we see that the overseas studies show more creativeness and less repetition.

By reviewing all the studies mentioned above, it seems that few papers have evaluated Dickens's impact on Zhang Tianyi, except two short articles: Tong Zhen and Hu Baohua's "Zhang Tianyi and Dickens" and Zhang Jinjun's "Dickens: The Cornerstone of Zhang Tianyi's Literature – On Zhang Tianyi's Acceptance of Dickens". As to these two papers, they only compare the artistic approaches and characters, and have left out discussions of the similarities and ignore the differences between these two writers from profound creative perspectives. In

³⁷ Sun Yifeng, *Fragmentation and Dramatic Moments: Zhang Tianyi and the Narrative Discourse of Upheaval in Modern China* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 158.

³⁸ Ibid., 220.

³⁹ Ibid., 263.

addition, the methodologies they used were old-fashioned, restricted to a comparison of the contents. In light of this, it is believed that this study can supplement the existing literature by comparing the similarities and contradictions in the thoughts of these two writers, and can shed new light on Zhang Tianyi studies.

There are of course numerous studies of Charles Dickens, and I have availed myself of the major ones. George Orwell's study from 1968 is worth mentioning in particular. I have taken the liberty of quoting his views frequently, mostly because I found his analysis and critique of Dickens to be sharper and more incisive than most academic studies, perhaps because he himself was a writer. Therefore, Orwell will be a major source when I am discussing Dickens.

Research Methodology

This research is designed to examine the extent to which Charles Dickens was one of an influence on Zhang Tianyi's literary creation. This research also aims to identify the reasons why Dickens influenced Zhang, as well as why they have several differences in their literary and artistic thought.

A Comparative Approach: Theory and Applications

Comparative Literature is an academic field mainly studying literature beyond national boundaries, often in relation to other disciplines (psychology, philosophy, history, sociology, politics, etc.) and other forms of artistic expression (the visual arts, film, music, etc.). In this field, there are two basic approaches. From the early twentieth century until the Second World War, the field of comparative literature was dominated by an observably empiricist and positivist approach, termed the "French School", in which the comparatists mainly sought the evidence of "origins" and "influences" between the texts from different nations. The "influence approach" regarded Comparative Literature as a branch of literary history, emphasizing the research of literary factual contacts and tracing causal relationships rather than aesthetic comparisons. And indeed, as Susan Bassnett notes, "the study of influences has always occupied an important place in comparative literature."⁴⁰ The features of this early approach advocated empirical study, closely reaching conclusions based on actual facts. According to David Damrosch,

"Works of art, however, are not simply sums of sources and influences: they are wholes in which raw materials derived from elsewhere cease to be inert matter and are assimilated into a new structure."⁴¹

Literature has both aesthetic value and cultural attributes and cannot be studied as the physical sciences are. Also, in this early stage of Comparative Literature, scholars tended to be "setting up canons of primary and secondary authors, greater

⁴⁰ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 13.

⁴¹ David Damrosch, et al. eds., *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 164.

and lesser texts, stronger and weaker cultures, majority and minority languages, and trying hard to keep the ideological implications of such hierarchization out of sight.”⁴²

After the war, the “parallel approach” was developed by American scholars; it came to be termed the “American School”.⁴³ This approach was based on Formalism and New Criticism, focusing not on the factual contacts but on the aesthetics and literariness of literature. The parallel study sought to return the field more directly to literary criticism by comparing origins, motifs, forms and images. Furthermore, by establishing the interdisciplinary nature of Comparative Literature, the parallel approach expanded the scope of the subject.

However, because of the influence of Formalism and New Criticism, the “American School” arguably overemphasised the aesthetic value of literature, placing literariness in the centre, excluding any other elements which could not be studied by aesthetic comparative methods.

More recently, there is a statement by Spivak that comparative literature in some sense is already dead.⁴⁴ In the past century, as well as in the nineteenth century, this subject has gradually shifted towards monolingualism in Europe and the English-speaking world. Spivak means that the old comparative literature through the prominence of the English language is declining. Accordingly, as Bassnet points out, comparative literature has seen a resurgence in Third World countries, showing how post-colonial literatures reacted to the West.⁴⁵

Although there are several schools in Comparative Literature with different emphasis, they share the basic comparative method and perspective. It is also worth noting that these different schools are not mutually exclusive. In this research, both influence and parallel approaches will be employed. The former will be used to seek the factual contacts between the two authors; the latter will be employed to examine some common characteristics in the aesthetical scope of the works. “Pursuing similarity, but using similarity as a starting-point for discovering what is different,

⁴² Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 93.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003)

⁴⁵ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 159.

orients a comparative project toward close reading.”⁴⁶ Hence, in the following sections, the application of comparative approaches in this research will be explained.

Initially, this study will start with a comparison of the environment, individual disposition and literary characteristics of Zhang Tianyi and Charles Dickens. The “Influence approach” is a method based on factual study; thus, the two authors’ diaries, criticisms, speeches, letters and their friends’ memories will be examined. By comparing these external factors, I will try to establish the differences and similarities between their literary lives. I am not seeking to establish proof of specific or direct influences with this approach, but rather I hope to show how backgrounds can lead to comparable outlooks. An awareness of the context in which the writers work helps add perspective to the literary comparisons. Indeed, one of the main aims of comparative literature is to “reveal the similarities among works, authors, movements, periods, and cultures.”⁴⁷ However, the emphasis will be on the specific textual parallel studies and analysis later on.

The “parallel approach” will be used in Chapter II. This study will compare Zhang and Dickens’s works in detail from several perspectives: “character comes first”, “representation”, “techniques of character portrayal”, “humorous and satirical writing style”, “children’s perspectives” and “language”. In addition, this research will delve into the structure of the two authors’ literary ideas by seeking agreement and controversy between Zhang and Dickens on a deep level. As comparison is “a method for highlighting the key features of literary works with the help of parallels and contrasts.”⁴⁸ After this, the discussion fleshes out the reasons for these discrepancies by considering their varying social and cultural backgrounds. After all, a country can intervene in art by various means with differing results.

“The relations between the state and artistic creation depend, in each case, on the nature of the society to which they belong...not only has the state never been the creator of an art of real value, but that each time it tries to transform art into a

⁴⁶ César Domínguez, Haun Saussy and Darío Villanueva, *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 75.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

tool for its own purpose, it ends by denaturalizing and degrading that art.”⁴⁹

Thus, different societies and eras form different art. Zhang’s works sprung from Chinese May Fourth soil, which is markedly different from Dickens’s Victorian era England. This separation necessarily differentiates their thoughts.

In Chapter IV, I will analyse five of Zhang’s short stories. I will provide detailed summaries since they are the basis of my analysis and I want to show in detail the various twists and turns of the plots and how characters are represented. There are many reversals and twists in Zhang’s work and I want to capture this fully. Also, in this chapter I would like to produce some new knowledge to break Zhang’s stereotypical image in certain studies.

Since “Chinese New Literature” was undoubtedly influenced by Western literature, for this study the comparative approach offers many advantages over other methods. Comparison is not the purpose but a means. The similarities between literatures can reveal how the literary legacy has been inherited by younger generations, and the differences can uncover the characteristics of different states’ literature as well as the cultural reasons behind these differences. Comparative Literature explores the unique aspects of different literatures and thus can lead us to recognise ourselves more clearly, for sometimes, we can see a truer self from the perspective of others.

⁴⁹ David Damrosch, et al. eds., *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 156.

Dickens in Republican China

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Zhang Tianyi mainly wrote children's literature and academic essays. The majority of Zhang's career in creative writing was in the 1930s and 1940s.

Throughout the literary history of Republican China, Charles Dickens exerted a tremendous impact on many people. Most people encountered Dickens through translations, and of course including Zhang Tianyi, at least in his early stage. The publishing of translated works embodies directly the reception of an author in foreign countries, thus the introduction of translations of Dickens's works in Republican China should be presented, as it is of great significance to this research.

In the late Qing Dynasty, there was a mass fervour for translations of foreign literature in China due to the interest in Western technology and culture. Dickens was one of the earliest foreign writers to be translated and introduced to China. Lin Shu and Wei Yi 魏易 were the first translators of Dickens's works.⁵⁰ From 1907 to 1909, five long novels by Dickens were translated by Lin Shu and Wei Yi and published by Shanghai Commercial Press. They were *Nicholas Nickleby* (*Huaji waishi* 滑稽外史 (6 volumes, 1907)), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (*Xiaonü nai'er zhuan* 孝女耐爾傳 (3 volumes, 1907)), *David Copperfield* (*Kuairou yushengshu* 塊肉餘生述 (4 volumes, 1908)), *Oliver Twist* (*Zeishi* 賊史 (2 volumes, 1908)) and *Dombey and Son* (*Bingxue yinyuan* 冰雪姻緣 (6 volumes, 1909)). These five novels open the reception of Dickens in China. Lin Shu did not understand English, so all of his translations were cooperations with his friends. Basically he wrote down the translation when listening to his friends' oral interpretation of the original texts. Therefore, the majority of Lin's translations are not particularly accurate. But no one introduced so many foreign novels to China before Lin, hence, a large number of readers learned about foreign literature through Lin's versions. In September 1910, *Little Dorrit* (*Yamei nüshi biezhuàn* 亞媚女士別傳), translated by Xue Yi'e 薛一謬 and Chen Jialin 陳家麟, was published. With six Dickens novels translated in merely four years, he made a

⁵⁰ Tong Zhen 童真, *Dickens and China (Digengsi yu Zhongguo 狄更斯與中國)*, (Xiang Tan: xiangtan daxue chubanshe, 2008), 92.

great impact upon China and the reception of these novels is worthy of note.

In the Republican period, Lin's translations were reprinted many times; some of Dickens's novellas and short stories were also translated into Chinese. In 1918, the translation of excerpts of *Pickwick Papers* was published by Chang Jue 常覺 and Xiao Die 小蝶 and entitled *Lüxing Xiaoshi* 旅行笑史. *Laoku shijie* 勞苦世界(*Hard Times*) was published in December 1926, translated by Wu Guangjian 伍光建, and then reprinted in November 1933 and June 1935. *A Tale of Two Cities* was first translated by Wei Yi 魏易 in 1928, entitled *Shuangcheng gushi* 雙城故事, then Wu Guangjian's version *Erjing ji* 二京記 was published in 1934. In the same year, Xi Shizhi's 奚識之 *Shuang cheng ji* 雙城記 was also published. In 1938, another version, also named *Shuang cheng ji*, was published by Zhang Youji 張由紀. Later, Haishang Shizhu 海上室主 translated *A Tale of Two Cities* into classical Chinese in April 1940.⁵¹ So by 1940, five versions of *A Tale of Two Cities* had been published. It was so popular mainly due to its theme of revolution, which was the most important topic in Republican China. From January 1943 to June 1945, Dawei Gaobofei'er zishu 大衛 高柏菲爾自述 (*David Copperfield*) was published in four volumes translated by Xu Tianhong 許天虹. His version of *A Tale of Two Cities* was published from January 1945 to January 1946, also named *Shuang Chengji*. In November 1945, he translated the first four chapters of *The Pickwick Papers*, entitled *Pike weike yigao* 匹克威克遺稿. Finally, from 1947 to 1948, Jiang Tianzuo's 蔣天佐 version of *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, Luo Jinan's 羅稷楠 *A Tale of Two Cities* and Dong Qiusi's 董秋斯 *David Copperfield* were published, entitled *Pike weike waizhuan* 匹克威克外傳, *Aolie fu'er* 奧列佛爾, *Shuang cheng ji*, and *Dawei Kebofei'er* 大衛 科波菲爾, respectively.⁵²

By 1949, nine of Dickens's novels had been translated into Chinese, as well as a few short stories. Among them, the most popular translations were Lin Shu's versions, which were reprinted over 20 times. Lin Shu was outstanding in Chinese translation history. Despite not knowing any foreign languages, he translated over 180 novels

⁵¹ Ibid., 94.

⁵² Ibid., 95.

with his collaborators. The five Dickens novels translated by Lin Shu and Wei Yi were well received by the public at large. There are some reasons for this. One such reason I believe is that Lin does not rigidly adhere to the original text, but he adeptly grasps the characters and the main storyline of Dickens's works, then presents them in a way that Chinese people used to like.⁵³ Secondly, in the late Qing Dynasty and the early years of the Republican period, classical Chinese was the formal written language. The character of classical Chinese is succinctness. Thus, Lin inevitably deletes many excessive details in Dickens's novels, in accord with Chinese reading and aesthetic habits. Thirdly, Lin injects Chinese traditional moral values into his translations, such as "filial respect", "humanity", "justice", "propriety", which are strongly emphasised in Chinese traditional moral philosophy. These virtues were thus familiar to Chinese readers and facilitated their resonance with the texts. "Although there are numerous mistranslations in Lin's versions, he still transfers the main ideas and artistic features of Dickens in a relatively complete way."⁵⁴ The essence of Dickens's novels, such as plots, character images and humourous style are effectively conveyed in Lin's translations. Michael Gibbs Hill notes:

"Many critics have praised the Dickens translations as examples of Lin's best work.[...]The purposeful verisimilitude Lin Shu found so important in Dickens's work would establish and sustain Dickens's reputation in China as not only a great novelist but also an important social reformer."⁵⁵

Therefore, it is believed that Lin's translations played an important role in the reception of Dickens in China, and they helped Dickens's works spread widely throughout the country. According to Zhang Tianyi's statement, he read Dickens's novel through Lin's translations mostly.⁵⁶

Following the New Culture Movement, many translators started to translate in vernacular Chinese. Wu Guangjian first used vernacular Chinese to translate

⁵³ Klaudia Hiu Yen Lee, *Charles Dickens and China, 1895-1915: Cross-Cultural Encounters*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 217.

⁵⁴ Hu Jun 胡軍, *Dickens and China (Digengsi he Zhongguo 狄更斯和中國)*, (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 188-191.

⁵⁵ Michael Gibbs Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.: Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98, 124.

⁵⁶ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "The life of My childhood" (Wo de younian shenghuo 我的幼年生活), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji 張天翼文集*, vol.9 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1991), 478.

Dickens's *Hard Times*, which was published in 1926. In the 1940s, there were several new translations of *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Oliver Twist* and *Pickwick Papers*, all of them written in vernacular Chinese. They helped to disseminate Dickens's works to new generations. In these new translations, Jiang Tianzuo's *Pike weike waizhuan* (*Pickwick Papers*) still acknowledged as a classic version, and it has been reprinted over eleven times.

Reasons for Zhang Tianyi Adopting Dickens

For ten years after the New Culture Movement, due to the rapid development of the publication industry, a great number of foreign literatures were translated and published in China. According to statistical data in the "Translation" (Fanyi 翻譯) section of Volume Ten of *The Anthology of Chinese New Literature* (1917-1927): "there were 451 types of personal publications and selections which were published from 1917 to 1927."⁵⁷ Within this ocean of foreign literature, Zhang Tianyi's choice of Dickens as a source of inspiration was by no means purely by chance.

"When an author is exposed to a reader, the reader's 'screen of acceptance' is the first one to be encountered. Everyone lives in a coordinate system which combines a longitudinal axis for history and cultural development with a horizontal axis for cultural access. It is this coordinate system which constructs the unique 'screen of acceptance' which comprises one's cultural attainment, knowledge, taste and personal experience. The 'screen of acceptance' decides which work can be accepted and resonates with the reader, which work can stimulate one's imagination and which work would be denied and ignored."⁵⁸

This chapter intends to identify Zhang's 'cultural coordinate' and 'screen of acceptance' by tracing the development and growth of Zhang's literary characteristics. Furthermore, I will explore the reasons why Zhang chose Dickens as his learning object from the perspectives of his environment, the development of his

⁵⁷ Zhao Jiabi 趙家璧 et al. eds. *Anthology of Chinese New Literature* vol.10 (*Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中國新文學大系) (Shanghai: Shanghai liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi, 1935), 384.

⁵⁸ Yue Daiyun 樂黛雲, *The Theory of Comparative Literature* (*Bijiao wenxue yuanli* 比較文學原理) (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1988), 46.

individual temperament, and the formation and transformation of his literary principles.

1. Influences of Zhang's Childhood

Zhang Tianyi's birth name was Zhang Yuanding 張元定, his adult name was Handi 漢弟, his art name was Yizhi 一之 and his pseudonyms include Zhang Tianjing 張天淨 and Tie Chihan 鐵池翰. He was born in Nanjing, but his ancestral home was in Hunan Province. "His ancestors were landlords, but his family started to decline in his father's generation".⁵⁹ His father, Zhang Tongmo 張通模, was a scholar (*ju ren* 舉人) at the end of the Qing Dynasty. Zhang's father

"...had read many novels and jokes and was fond of jesting and passing satirical remarks... His second elder sister, Zhang Jiamei 張稼梅, taught him reading and vocabulary. She also wrote him many letters, telling him all kinds of things and recommending many books to him, and thereby significantly influenced him during his teenage years. She loved to talk about indirect jokes and to describe others, which often touched the bottom of the listener's heart".⁶⁰

In addition to his father, there was an old Mama Wang, who told stories to Zhang every night when he was young, e.g. "Xu Wenchang" 徐文長 or "Pitan tongjiang" 屁彈銅匠 (both of which are funny stories).

Because Zhang remained in close contact with his family members and was subjected to their humour when he was a child, it became part of his personality from a young age.

As a giant of realist literature, Dickens entered into Zhang Tianyi's horizon in his early childhood.

⁵⁹ Zhang Tianyi, "Autobiographical sketch" (Zixu xiaozhuan 自敘小傳), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuanguo* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 11.

⁶⁰ Zhang Tianyi, "Zhang Tianyi's life" (Zhang Tianyi shengping 張天翼生平), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenxue pinglun ji* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 633-634.

“His mother, whose name was Wei Maoxian 魏茂先, was born in a literary family. She could read and write, was sentimental, and loved to tell stories to her children. Once, when she was telling *Dombey and Son* translated by Lin Shu to her children, she was moved to tears”.⁶¹

It can be seen that as a young child, Dickens was one of the authors that enlightened Zhang through his mother. This enabled him to soak up the unique literary charm of Dickens’s novels at a young age. Thus, Dickens was one among other writers who influence Zhang since his childhood.

2. Development of Individual Temperament

In an article entitled “My Days with Zhang Tianyi” (1980), written in memory of Zhang, Zhou Songdi 周頌棣, who was Zhang’s middle school classmate, mentioned: “He was very good at telling stories and imitating some teachers’ intonation and gestures... He often pretended to be a teacher, talking, teaching, dancing, or making all kinds of funny appearances so that all of us broke into loud laughter.”⁶² Zhang said about himself: “Less than two weeks since I went to the middle school and everyone in the school knows me. Be it teacher or classmate, I always like to make fun of them.”⁶³ Thus, it can be seen that Zhang had a fondness and gift for sarcasm from his childhood. Jiang Tianzuo 蔣天佐, who also had deep friendship with Zhang, recalled that: “What impressed us most were his endless jokes and stories. All of his jokes and stories were humorous, vivid, and full of wit and fun, and could make everyone there to burst into laughter.”⁶⁴ From these descriptions of his schoolmates and friends, it may be concluded that his agile, witty and fun-loving temperament did not change from childhood. In addition, with the development of this kind of temperament, his aesthetic preference for humour was also formed.

⁶¹ Ibid., 633.

⁶² Zhou Songdi 周頌棣, “The Days I Spent with Tianyi” (Wo he Tianyi xiangchu de rizi 我和天翼相處的日子), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 62.

⁶³ Zhang Tianyi, “The life of My childhood” (Wo de younian shenghuo 我的幼年生活), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuangzuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 8.

⁶⁴ Jiang Tianzuo 蔣天佐, “A few things about Zhang Tianyi” (Ji Zhang Tianyi tongzhi jijian shi 記張天翼同志幾件事), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 87.

3. Formation and Transformation of Zhang's Literary Characteristics

Because the middle school in Hangzhou where Zhang Tianyi studied belonged to the old educational system, his thinking was rather conservative during his middle school years. Under the influence of Lin Shu's translations and journals like *Saturday* (Libailiu 禮拜六), he wrote some comic and detective stories which indicated his ability to imagine, create, and tell stories. After he graduated from middle school, he studied drawing and painting for one year.⁶⁵ He then successfully entered the foundation program of Peking University, and started to get in touch with Marxism, but he dropped out of school and instead commenced his career. During that period of time, his family fortunes were depleted and so that he had to take up the financial burden of his family. He engaged in all kinds of jobs successively, and came into contact with large number of people among the lowest social classes. As a result, he gained a deeper understanding of those people. This eventually completely changed his literary creation concepts; that is, he diverted from a preference for popular literature to literary realism.⁶⁶ Then with the maturation of his aesthetic concepts, his preferences for themes, writing materials and his art techniques all tended to become more and more like those of Dickens.

⁶⁵ Shen Chengkuan 沈成寬 et al. eds. *Research Materials on Zhang Tianyi* (*Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* 張天翼研究資料) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 11.

⁶⁶ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Autobiographical Sketch" (*Zixu xiaozhuan* 自敘小傳), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.9 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1991), 482,483.

Chapter II: The Similarities between Dickens and Zhang Tianyi

According to Yin Xueman 尹雪曼, from 1928 to 1938, Zhang Tianyi was “the best new writer during this period in Chinese new literature”.⁶⁷ Like many other Republican Chinese authors, Zhang’s work echoed foreign literature from the very beginning. Dickens is one of the foreign writers who influenced Zhang. In this chapter, the similarities between Zhang and Dickens will be elaborated from perspectives such as the “Character comes first” (Renwu diyi 人物第一), choosing a topic, character building techniques, humorous and satirical writing style, children’s perspectives, and language.

⁶⁷ Yin Xueman 尹雪曼, “Zhang Tianyi ‘Three Sketches’” (Zhang Tianyi suxie sanpian 張天翼速寫三篇), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 428.

Section I: “Character Comes First”

In Zhang Tianyi’s discussion in “On character description” (tan renwu miaoxie 談人物描寫, 1941), he divided fiction into two types: one is writing a kind of story that cannot be told explicitly, the other is a straightforward story. He believes that:

“Those kinds of straightforward stories are at most inferior goods, and only those stories which focus on people but inexplicitly told are good. Those straight inferior goods only tell a story, and were written just for telling the story ... Characters are always the subject and have the initiative, that is, it is because of their actions and movements that there are stories. So they always come first.”⁶⁸

From these words, it is clear that when his aesthetic thoughts reached full maturation, he elevated characters to the highest level in his literary creation. Fundamentally, literature is a kind of human study; to some extent, good literature is about humans, but not stories, it explores the complexities of human nature. In Zhang’s opinion, whether to focus on characters or stories has become the most important distinction between pure literature and popular literature.

Zhang transformed from focusing on fantastic and supernatural stories to building characters in his early literary career. In order to pursue excellence, Zhang chose a character-centred approach. He discusses the relationship between the characters and stories in his essay, asserting that the stories originate from the characters:

“Stories are just means to indicate the characters’ personality, thought, emotion, life, desire, activity, destiny, and the relationship to their environment. A character should match his own story; if we change the character in his exclusive story, then the whole story cannot exist, because this story does not suit another character.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “On character description” (Tan renwu miaoxie 談人物描寫), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuanguo*, (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 188-191.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 191-192.

Hence, as shown in the previous chapters, Zhang attaches great importance to character description. The characters are the chief source of his literary creation; all the other factors derive from the characters and serve them. Zhang deliberately ignores storytelling, thus his works tend to display some weakness in narrative sophistication.

Take Zhang's most famous work "Mr. Hua Wei" as an example, it was first published in *Literary Battle Formation* (*Wenyi Zhendi* 文藝陣地 vol.1, no.1) on April 16th, 1938. It is a satire. The protagonist is an officious bureaucrat who is endlessly busy yet accomplishes nothing. He attends various meetings of different organisations during the Sino-Japanese war. In this short story, Mr. Hua Wei is the only key figure throughout the whole story. It starts with a dialogue between Mr. Hua Wei and the narrator (actually, only Mr. Hua Wei is talking). After only one sentence, Mr. Hua Wei says that he is extremely busy because of the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese war. There are a good number of meetings, organisations, societies, waiting for him to lead. So "busy" is the label of Mr. Hua Wei; he is always busy for those trifles. After that, the narrator gives us a sketch of the appearance of Mr. Hua Wei, then three fragments of three meetings, and ends with three dialogues with different people. It is clear that there are multiple plots in the whole story, but these plots are presented with no connection or logical relation between them, they are just parallel. The only relation between these plots is that they are all about Mr. Hua Wei. Therefore, Mr. Hua Wei is the centre for the whole story, with all the other factors surrounding him. The reason for creating all of the plots is to set up this character. This is a good short story, which immediately received a lot of attention after it was published.⁷⁰ The greatest success comes from Zhang's extreme terseness and the successful character establishment. Actually, "Mr. Hua Wei" has no integrated story at all, it is filled with fragments. This problem is not obvious in short stories; but it could be a huge problem for a novel. Some critics believe that Zhang is an excellent short story writer, but he was less successful when writing novels.⁷¹ In fact, Zhang only wrote five novels; it was his short stories that made him famous. *Ghostland Diary* (first serialized on *Youzhi Zhoukan* 幼稚週刊 1930), Zhang's first novel, is hard

⁷⁰ Shen Chengkuan 沈成寬 et al. eds. *Research Materials on Zhang Tianyi* (*Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* 張天翼研究資料) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 307-331.

⁷¹ Shen Wu 慎吾, "On Zhang Tianyi's fiction" (*Guanyu Zhang Tianyi de xiaoshuo* 關於張天翼的小說), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 244.

to categorise as a novel. The reason for it being regarded as a novel is mostly based on its length. In fact, it can be seen as a series of short stories spliced together as a whole, and I consider it to be very similar to Dickens's first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, which also can be seen as a collection of short stories. In *Ghostland Diary*, every section is entitled as "someday" and connects each other with no transition, so it does not have much structure at all. This means it can stop or continue from every "someday". The other four novels also have this looseness of structure.

In addition, on many occasions, Zhang's observation of people is quite narrow; he extracts the core of a person's feature, quickly sketches it and then suddenly stops. The most prominent peculiarity of his writing technique is its one-sidedness, which captures some life episodes that reflect the whole picture of life. This is a main composition characteristic of short stories or sketches, whereas if it is employed in longer novels, it usually leads to tediousness because the characters always repeat themselves. As Wu Fuhui points out, "when he creates a character, he never starts from the experience, but always puts emphasis on the most obvious external distinction and the shape of the character. The figures he creates are relatively still."⁷² In long novels, what we need are solid, rich and complete characters, rather than static characters portraits.

Thus, it is clear that "Character comes first" is Zhang Tianyi's core concept of literary creation. All of his works, including his short stories, his novella and his long novels, follow this rule. He really believes that character establishment is the first element of literature, and he clings to this rule so tightly, that other significant factors are ignored.

Zhang's emphasis on character establishment can be linked to Dickens. They even share some similar drawbacks. Some scholars have pointed out that in Dickens's novels "the plot can develop synchronically with the development of the characters' personalities."⁷³ Thus it may be claimed that his plots always follow his characters.

⁷² Wu Fuhui 吳福輝, "Sharp. Fresh. Exaggerated—On the characters and description skills of Zhang Tianyi's satirical novels" (Fengli. xinxian. kuazhang—shilun Zhang Tianyi fengci xiaoshuo de renwu jiqi miaoxie yishu 鋒利. 新鮮. 誇張——試論張天翼諷刺小說的人物及其描寫藝術), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 378.

⁷³ Zhang Ling 張玲, "Preface to translation" (Yiben xu 譯本序), in Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, trans. Zhang Guruo

The biggest feature of Dickens's novels is that the status of the characters are of the greatest importance and run through the whole book, but the story is relatively loose and weak, and as a result the characters he creates also appear one-sided. Most of his novels do not have a strong central story or a plot line; they are filled with little stories and details. As Humphry House says: "It is sometimes said in discussions of Dickens's technique as novelist that any of his great characters could step out of one book into another without materially disturbing the arrangement of either."⁷⁴ George Orwell also noted: "his greatest success is *The Pickwick Papers*, which is not a story at all, merely a series of sketches."⁷⁵ Coincidentally, this comment is exactly what critics have remarked upon with Zhang's works: "His novels lack structure and overall arrangement; these novels can only be piece of art rather than a whole. His *A Year* can stop but also can continue hundreds of pages from everywhere."⁷⁶

In fact, *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens's earliest novel, was not initially written as a novel. The original title of this book is *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, containing a faithful record of the perambulations, perils, travels, adventures, and sporting transactions of the corresponding members*, edited by Boz (Dickens's first pseudonym). It was issued in monthly parts between April 1836 and November 1837, and then published as a book in 1837. Before writing *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens was a newspaper reporter and a sketch-writer.⁷⁷ He published many short pieces such as 'Sketches of London' (1835) in newspapers or periodicals. At first, *The Pickwick Papers* was written as characters portraits of some English gentlemen's activities at the weekend and accompanied by illustrations; there was no detailed writing project for the whole story. In fact, even Dickens himself did not know how long this story would be, as it depended on sales. The situation was different from before, as Peter Ackroyd has observed, "On this first occasion he deliberately revised the sketches to make them more suitable for the readership of a book rather than that of a newspaper."⁷⁸ However, they are still sketches.

(Shanghai: Shanghai yiwen chubanshe, 2007), 8.

⁷⁴ Humphry House, "The Changing Scene", *The Dickens World*, 1941, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 324.

⁷⁵ George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", in George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, vol.1), 442.

⁷⁶ Shen Wu 慎吾, "On Zhang Tianyi's fiction" (Guanyu Zhang Tianyi de xiaoshuo 關於張天翼的小說), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 244.

⁷⁷ Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 77.

⁷⁸ Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Minerva, 1991), 185.

We can regard *The Pickwick Papers* as a continuous introduction to new characters with completely independent short stories. It begins with introductions of the members of Pickwick club, and then adds new characters along with their activities. Nearly each of the plotlines is an independent and complete narrative unit, so if we miss two or three chapters, we can still go on without confusion. In G.K. Chesterton's words:

"The structure of the story drops to pieces, the plot is abandoned; the other characters deserted at every kind of crisis; the whole crowded thoroughfare of the tale is blocked by two or three talkers, who take their immortal ease as if they were already in Paradise. For they do not exist for the story; the story exists for them; and they know it."⁷⁹

The central story is less memorable than the characters. What we remember are the angelic Mr. Pickwick, the sportsman Winkle, the poet Snodgrass, the romantic lover Tupman, the loyal servant Sam and the actor Jingle. These immortal characters raised Dickens's ambitions and brought him worldwide fame.

Oliver Twist, another famous Dickens novel, is a more conventional novel than *The Pickwick Papers*, at least the first half of it (Oliver Twist's adventure). The story begins with the birth of Oliver Twist, an orphan who was born into a life of poverty in a workhouse. After several plot twists and tangled intrigues, which bring together a great number of people, Oliver Twist is rescued by Rose Maylie and her aunt from Fagin's hands. From then, little Oliver makes few appearances in the rest of the story, which contains the romantic love of Rose and Harry, secret conversations between Monks and Fagin; the marriage of Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney; the transaction between Mr. Bumble and Monks; the help and death of Nancy; the trial of the Artful Dodger; the Death of Bill, Monks and Fagin, etc.⁸⁰ The majority of these plots are more or less concerning Oliver Twist, except the subplots such as the romantic love, marriage and the trial, which were mentioned above. It seems that

⁷⁹ G.K. Chesterton, "Charles Dickens", 1906, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 246.

⁸⁰ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Macmillan And Co., 1892).

Dickens abandons *Oliver Twist* in the second half of the novel, and narrates the story by using the other characters. In addition, the subplots are long, containing several chapters, just like those in *The Pickwick Papers*. Finally, yet crucially, the connections, which relate those plots, are somewhat farfetched and contain some improbabilities. For instance, in Chapter 49, Brownlow demoralises Monks's resistance with the opening words: "The only proof of the boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin."⁸¹ These are the exact same words that Nancy overheard from the secret meeting between Monks and Fagin. Nancy told Rose in a furious meeting in Chapter 40, then Rose precisely remembered them and passed on to Brownlow, who uses them against Monks with the exact same words that he spoke to Fagin in a supposedly secret conversation. This kind of flawless transmission seems impossible. However, Dickens does not care how odd it looks, the most important thing for him is to make impressive characters and he was successful in this. For him, all the plots should suit the corresponding characters. Therefore, the snaky Monks hatches a conspiracy, kind Nancy who sympathises with poor little Oliver informs Rose against Monks and Fagin, and virtuous Rose asks upright Brownlow to help solve the final problem. This is reasonable for Dickens, for he believes that credible characters makes logical stories.

Moreover, in Dickens's stories, the characters not only create the plots separately, but also connect them to the complex interactions. In fact, the plotlines of the first half of *Oliver Twist* are connected by Oliver Twist, and the second half by Monks and Nancy, and of course, all through Dickens's manipulation. Monks relates Fagin to Oliver Twist, and Nancy relates Monks to Oliver's decent friends who can solve the problems. Fagin represents the dark underworld, and Oliver's respectable friends represent the middle-class world. Therefore, *Oliver Twist* is about a conflict between these two worlds that fight for the ownership of Oliver Twist, and the novel ends with the victory of the bourgeois world. It is clear that the characters are central in Dickens's world; they produce and relate the plots, which leads to the loose structure of his novels. As G.K. Chesterton notes: "this should be firmly grasped, that the units of Dickens, the primary elements, are not the stories, but the characters who affect

⁸¹ Ibid.,357.

the stories- or, more often still, the characters who do not affect the stories.”⁸²

Of course, not all of Dickens’s works are like this. Plot-driven examples of Dickens’s work include *A Tale of Two Cities*, which is a complete, clear, and smooth story, as well as *Hard Times*. But George Orwell argues, “these are just the two which are always rejected as ‘not like Dickens’ – and incidentally they were not published in monthly numbers.”⁸³ Most of Dickens’s novels were serialised in monthly magazines, except *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Hard Times*, which were published as weekly serials. This shortness of the weekly instalments made readers less interested in each subplot, so Dickens had to stick more closely to the main story.

Overall, Dickens puts so much emphasis on character building and making the characters create their own self-sufficient and independent stories, that, as a result, the characters dominate the whole novel and weakens the structure of the stories. In my hypothesis, if we remove the characters from his novels, the plots are shattered and fragmented, which is somewhat like Zhang Tianyi’s works, such as “Mr. Hua Wei”. The most efficient angle from which we can judge their works is the characters, and more importantly, the fragmented sketches.

The last thing we should attempt to gauge in their novels is story coherence. The novels are to a great extent just collections of little fragments, rather than organic wholes. The reason for this striking similarity is because both Dickens and Zhang focus on character building, and their imaginations are incomparably rich. The irrelevant subplots follow their vivid imaginations, and tend to be unstoppable. Dickens and Zhang share this trait in literary creation.

⁸² G.K. Chesterton, “Charles Dickens”, 1906, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 245.

⁸³ George Orwell, “Charles Dickens”, in George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, vol.1), 442.

Section II: Representation of Social Classes

In the “Preface to *A History of Thieves*” (Zeishi-xu 賊史-序, *A History of Thieves* is a translation based on *Oliver Twist*, 1908), Lin Shu argued that Dickens tried his best to reveal the filth of lower social classes. He also praised Dickens for abandoning all the games of the celebrities and the beauties as materials but exclusively describing the “lower levels of society”.⁸⁴ Dickens, as Margaret Oliphant argues:

“Was one of the first popular writers who brought pictures of what is called common life into fashion. It is he who has been mainly instrumental in leading the present generation of authors to disregard to a great extent the pictorial advantages of life on the upper levels of society, and to find a counter-picturesqueness in the experiences of the poor.”⁸⁵

Indeed, the characters in Dickens’s novels embody people from all occupations and social classes in Britain at that time. As Walter Bagehot noted: “His range is very varied. He has attempted to describe every kind of scene in English life, from quite the lowest to almost the highest...Mr. Dickens’s novels aim to delineate nearly all that part of our national life which can be delineated”,⁸⁶ e.g., his famous work *David Copperfield* can be deemed as a genre painting of British social life in the nineteenth century on a grand scale. Any survey of Dickens’s corpus will reveal a huge cast of characters. In Anthony Trollope’s words:

“no other writer of the English language except Shakespeare has left so many types of characters as Dickens has done, characters which are known by their names familiarly as household words...And it may be doubted whether even Shakespeare has done this for so wide a circle of acquaintances.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Michael Gibbs Hill, *Lin Shu, Inc.: Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101.

⁸⁵ Margaret Oliphant, “Sensation Novels”, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, vol.91, 1862, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 158.

⁸⁶ Walter Bagehot, “Charles Dickens”, *National Review*, vol.7, 1858, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 124.

⁸⁷ Anthony Trollope, “Charles Dickens”, *St Paul’s Magazine*, vol.6, 1870, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 180.

On February 17th, 1812, Charles Dickens was born in a typical petty bourgeois family. His father John Dickens worked in the Naval Pay Office and earned over one hundred pounds per year (rose to the peak of three hundred and fifty pounds in 1820).⁸⁸ When Dickens was nine years old, his family came down in the world, mainly due to his father's merrymaking. Dickens's father was sent to debtors' prison when he was eleven and his mother took his younger sisters and brothers to live in the prison to save money. As the eldest son, Dickens had to work in a blacking-warehouse as a child labourer and visited his family in prison after he was paid every weekend. This miserable period made a lasting impression on Dickens, even keeping his history a secret from his wife. It is this painful experience that made Dickens deeply sympathise with poor and oppressed people, especially children, and laid the spiritual foundation for exposing the various drawbacks of British society in his later literary career. A few months later (1824), his father received a small legacy from a relative's death, which allowed him to be released from prison. This also led to Dickens's removal from the blacking-warehouse. Dickens was then sent to Wellington House Academy to study, but only for two years. After the small inheritance was spent, Dickens had to enter the world to earn his living. He successively worked as a junior clerk at the law office, a freelance reporter in the newspaper office and a stenographer in the court. I believe that these precious experiences widened Dickens's knowledge and provided the majority of inspiration for works such as *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Dombey and Son*, and, most particularly, *Bleak House*. In these novels, Dickens vividly portrays the mechanisms and bureaucracy of the legal system in Britain.

A variety of life experiences helped Dickens to understand the hardships of the people, especially the heavy burden on the poor. Therefore, most of Dickens's characters are ordinary people, belonging mainly to the middle and lower classes. They are lawyers, clerks, merchants, hotel owners, craftsmen, servants and workers. Several critics have identified Dickens as a writer for "the people". Hence, his chief audience also came from the middle and lower-middle classes. This is why when he died, thousands of people came to his grave at Westminster to pay their respects,

⁸⁸ Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 13, 20.

“many of them dropping flowers onto his coffin- ‘among which,’ his son said, ‘were afterwards found several small rough bouquets of flowers tied up with pieces of rag.’”⁸⁹ It is hard to count precisely how many characters Dickens has created – nearly two thousand of them. On this list, there are many memorable characters like Samuel Pickwick (a kind gentlemen), Oliver Twist (a waif), Fagin (a criminal gang boss of young boys), Nicholas Nickleby (a typical petty bourgeoisie), Wackford Squeers (a brutal schoolmaster), Nell Trent (an angelic little girl), Daniel Quilp (a villain, money lender), David Copperfield (the protagonist of Dickens’s pseudo-autobiography, another typical petty bourgeois), Uriah Heep (a hypocritical secretary), Wilkins Micawber (a kind-hearted cadging scoundrel), Madame Defarge (wife of wine shop keeper), Sydney Carton (a lawyer), etc. This cornucopia of characters affords us many topics of discussion.

Dickens wrote fifteen novels, these novels contains a wide range of subjects. Chronologically, I believe that Dickens’s literary career can be divided into three periods. The first period from *The Pickwick Papers* to *Barnaby Rudge*, was an intense period (one novel per year). *The Pickwick Papers* is a series of loosely-related adventures, a typical picaresque. The main theme of *The Pickwick Papers* is the injustice of the legal system. Whilst exploring this theme, Dickens portrays nearly every aspect of a typical English gentleman’s life, so its subject is British gentlemen. The topic of *Oliver Twist* is the adventure of an innocent orphan in the den of thieves. *Nicholas Nickleby* is about a young man supporting his mother and sister after his father dies. *The Old Curiosity Shop* is a tragedy about a poor little girl living with her maternal grandfather in his shop of antiques. *Barnaby Rudge* is a historical novel about anti-Catholic riots in 1780 in Britain.

The middle period from 1842 to 1858 contains six novels (from *Martin Chuzzlewit* to *Little Dorrit*). *Martin Chuzzlewit* is also a picaresque novel; the most important feature of its subject is that the author portrays the United States (which he had visited in 1842) through a sharply satirical lens. *Dombey and Son* is about the rise and decline of the company of Dombey, who is a successful capitalist. *David Copperfield* is a well-known semi-autobiographical novel based on Dickens’s life.

⁸⁹ Peter Ackroyd, “Prologue”, in *Dickens* (London: Michelin House, 1991), xiv.

Bleak House centres on a long-running litigation regarding a legacy, which has profound influences upon all people involved. The story of *Hard Times* is set in the fictitious Victorian industrial Coketown; this fiction mainly focuses on the conflict between workers and capitalists. The topic of *Little Dorrit* is debtors' prisons; it talks about the drawbacks of government and society.

The later period extends from 1858 to the year he died. *A Tale of Two Cities* is another historical novel, which mainly describes the French Revolution. *Great Expectations* depicts the pipe dream of a humble orphan who chases a cold and beautiful woman as well as social status. *Our Mutual Friend* also focuses on a huge legacy. Dickens's last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, is a detective-like story about love and murder. We find that these novels cover a wide range of topics, and these topics need all sorts of characters for support. These characters and the events around them almost construct between them the wide world of nineteenth century Great Britain.

Among Republican Chinese writers, Zhang Tianyi is probably incomparable, considering the broad range of topics he used. Zhang underwent similar experiences to Dickens. In his early years, he also touched upon all kinds of people in society, and his range may even be wider than Dickens's. In his literary works, there are tradesmen, handcrafters, tramps, primary school teachers, dockworkers, despotic landlords, servants, woman workers, apprentices, soldiers, riffraff, office personnel, proletarians, and many other vivid characters that jointly construct a gallery of rich and colorful artistic images. Actually, Zhang captures nearly every aspect of the main topics: party, army, village, bandit, civil strife, traitor, school, worker, children of the nineteen-thirties in China. In Republican Chinese literature, this scope of social description is rare.⁹⁰

The scope of the topics in Zhang's works is immense as he strives to cover all topics of the time to reflect his sociopolitical moment, his works functioning as a mirror of the times. His broad vision and wide range of topics show his great ambition. The similarities between Dickens and Zhang also involves the wide range of choice of

⁹⁰ Gu Zhongyi 顧仲彝, "Zhang Tianyi's short stories" (Zhang Tianyi de duanpian xiaoshuo 張天翼的短篇小說), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 267.

topics. According Du Yuanming's (杜元明) statistics:

"In all of Zhang's works, there are 11 works involved with high society (capitalists, politicians, landlords, bureaucrats, celebrities, scholars, traitors, etc.); 56 works refer to the middle-class (small clerks, petty bourgeois intellectuals, petty bureaucrats, small landlords, small traders, small money lenders, civil servants, teachers, etc.); 27 works concern the people who live in the lowest echelons of society (workers, farmers, soldiers, jobless, poor students, beggars, prostitutes, Chinese traditional opera performers, wet nurses, etc.)."⁹¹

Thus, Zhang shares many elements of Dickens's vision and both of them mainly focus on the lower-class of the society. Similar life experiences and careful observations about their surroundings make them both pursue such an expanse of topics. However, when we talk about the universality of topics in their works, Zhang might transcend Dickens in this aspect. They share the same social origins – both of them were born into petty bourgeois back-grounds, but Zhang joined the Communist Party of China in 1927, and he had close contact with many poor people⁹². In fact, Dickens is not as familiar with lower-class people as we assume. George Orwell proposed that

"He has no contact with industry or the soil"⁹³, "The central action of Dickens's stories almost invariably takes place in middle-class surroundings. If one examines his novels in detail one finds that his real subject-matter is the London commercial bourgeoisie and their hangers-on – lawyers, clerks, tradesmen, innkeepers, small craftsmen and servants."⁹⁴

Thus, Dickens's range of subjects is narrower than Zhang's. For instance, Dickens rarely depicts workers, only one (Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*) as an industrial

⁹¹ Du Yuanming 杜元明, *The papers on Zhang Tianyi's works (Zhang Tianyi xiaoshuo lungao 張天翼小說論稿)* (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1985), 36.

⁹² "A Brief Biography of Zhang Tianyi" (Zhang Tianyi Zhuanlue 張天翼傳略), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 3.

⁹³ George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", in George Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, vol.1), 428.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 415.

worker, also, he has no portraits of any peasants. Therefore, this slight narrowness of vision makes Dickens's satire less sharp compared to Zhang, which makes his irony gentler. In a way, Dickens represents the gentility of Great Britain, while Zhang's unique expansive range of topics makes him stand out among Republican Chinese authors. This point will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Section III: Character Description Skills

After Zhang Tianyi graduated from middle school in Hangzhou 杭州, he studied drawing and painting at Shanghai Art College for one year. He had a special gift for painting. As Zhou Songdi 周頌棣 notes “very often, he used sketching techniques to draw a foreigner, a woman or a kid’s head in a simple manner.”⁹⁵ As a boy, Zhang had a talent for papercutting or making clay figurines, for he could easily capture one’s peculiarity in a short time and show them in a vivid way. This kind of technique that sticks to certain features of a character and then amplifies them was also applied to his literary creations.

“His creative methods sometimes help readers naturally associate with the cartoon style.”⁹⁶ Zhang employs exaggeration, symbolisation and imagination from painting, thus he often describes his figures looking exaggerated, weird, ironic and impressive. The following examples are only a selection: Nine Master (Jiuye 九爺) in “Smile”:

“The lines of his cheek split the corners of his mouth, and show up his crooked teeth. Some of the teeth are black, others which protrude from the gum are yellow. Those flashing teeth are gold teeth – bronze – according to Taoist Lee (Li Daoshi 李道士), these teeth are not genuine gold, but foreign sweet wrappers. He picked them up and stuck them on his teeth.”⁹⁷

Mr. Xie (Xie laoshi 謝老師) in “Season of Tomb Sweeping”: “Mr. Xie is wearing an unpleasant simper on his long face, some of his artificial teeth are squeezed out, and he is greeting people with his triangular eyes.”⁹⁸, and Li Tianjun 李天君 in “Counter-attack”:

⁹⁵ Zhou Songdi 周頌棣, “The Days I Spent with Tianyi” (Wo he Tianyi xiangchu de rizi 我和天翼相處的日子), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 63.

⁹⁶ Keiichi Itō 伊藤敬一(いとう けいいち), “Zhang Tianyi’s fiction and children’s fiction” (Zhang Tianyi de xiaoshuo he tonghua 張天翼的小說和童話), trans. Gao Peng 高鵬, in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 446.

⁹⁷ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Smile” (Xiao 笑), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.2 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 108.

⁹⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Season of Tomb Sweeping” (Qingming shijie 清明時節), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.3 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 7.

“He is thin and small, with high cheekbones, yellow and a slightly cyan face. His nose is as big as the jade that he brings when he meets District Magistrate Wang (Wang zhixian 王知縣). Whenever he starts to talk, an array of sparse yellow teeth shows up, as agates.”⁹⁹

Above all, the most significant feature of the kind character description that Zhang Tianyi employs is the extraction of habitual gestures and phrases of characters. Undoubtedly, one of the simplest linguistic devices that can be used to aid in characterisation is the repetition of habitual gestures and phrases. Habitual phrases may occur in the speech of particular characters or they may be phrases habitually used by the author when describing one of his characters. Zhang is good at grasping the typical images of typical people. When building a character, he pays special attention to extract habitual gestures and pet phrases of characters that can reveal individualities, which means he labels characters. Examples are innumerable and include Nine Master in “Smile”, who is always squinting with his left eye and twitching with his right eye; Changsheng Nainai (長生奶奶) in “A Female Buddhist Devotee” (Shan nüren 善女人), who is always blowing her nose with her hand and then throwing it on the ground; Huang Yi'an (黃宜庵) in “The Bulwark”, who is always rubbing his feet with fingers and smelling them with his nose; Li Siyi in “Moving On”, whose big belly is always protruding, scratching his hair with his fat right ring finger; Old Zhang in “New Life”, who is always picking his teeth with the long fingernail of the little finger, etc. Also, most of Zhang's figures have their unique pet phrases; for instance, the one-eyed man (Duyan long 獨眼龍) in “Counter-attack” usually says that “The one-eyed man is loyal to friends, and I'll be your bodyguard.”; Piggut (Zhuchangzi 豬腸子) in “Piggut's Chagrin” often says that “That would be great, that would be great.”; Gao Da 高大 in “A Beeline System” likes to say “egg”; Shu Keji in “Fatalism and Fortune-telling” likes to answer “a slovenly thing” when people ask him about his job; Old Zhang in “New Life” always asks others to buy his drinks by saying “I apologize for my own inconvenience, this is supposed to my treat” in a hypocritical and funny way (this character very easily brings to mind Mr. Micawber in *David*

⁹⁹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Counter-attack” (Fangong 反攻), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 441.

Copperfield) etc. By strengthening and exaggerating a recognised habitual gesture or phrase, a character becomes recognisable by the eccentricities of his action or language. This kind of character construction and labelling is easily reminiscent of Dickens. As Wu Fuhui once commented:

“Zhang Tianyi is used to concentrating all the complexities of the connotation of a character’s personality to one point and is used to highlighting big personalities through small features. His Dickensian extraction of figures’ characteristic gestures and phrases and the exaggerative description of the extractions are really very famous.”¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, many critics, such as Hu Feng or Shen Wu have considered Zhang’s method of description of characters to be excessively simple and superficial.¹⁰¹ Zhang talked about this method in his essay:

“In a work, the author often describes a character’s habits such as nail-biting or eating chilies and then these habits become the figure’s personality... These little traits can represent the character’s personality, it is one of means of description. It is just like describing the big ears that Zhu Bajie 豬八戒 uses as a place for hiding money. If you do not describe a character who loves to bite nails, you will definitely use other methods to show this trait... This trick has two functions: it shapes one’s typical personality and makes the character vivid, active and realistic.”¹⁰²

We should say Zhang’s opinion does make sense. His Dickensian facial design of characters is one of the tricks of building exaggerated, comical characters, which should not be dismissed completely. This comedy styled trick makes Hu Feng call Zhang a “cartoonist writer”.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Wu Fuhui 吳福輝, “Sharp. Fresh. Exaggerated—On the characters and description skills of Zhang Tianyi’s satirical novels” (Fengli. xinxian. kuazhang—shilun Zhang Tianyi fengci xiaoshuo de renwu jiqi miaoxie yishu 鋒利. 新鮮. 誇張——試論張天翼諷刺小說的人物及其描寫藝術), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 389.

¹⁰¹ Shen Chengkuan 沈成寬 et al. eds. *Research Materials on Zhang Tianyi (Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao 張天翼研究資料)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 244, 280.

¹⁰² Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “On character description” (Tan renwu miaoxie 談人物描寫), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuanguo*, (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 263-264.

¹⁰³ Hu Feng 胡風, “On Zhang Tianyi” (Zhang Tianyi lun 張天翼論), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu*

Coincidentally, it has often been remarked that Dickens is a “caricaturist”.¹⁰⁴ He himself did not think so, but this epithet undoubtedly shows Dickens’s extraordinary talent in building satirical characters. Indeed, many of the most well-known characters in Dickens’s writings seem funny, and a caricature is a funny, satirical character portrait, just like cartoon characters. Moreover, one of the most important character description skills used by Dickens is repetition. Dickensian repetition, the repetition of habitual gestures and phrases of characters, is a hallmark of his work. A gesture (or a phrase), either descriptive or conversational, once associated with a particular character, will be repeated at intervals throughout the novel, whenever that character is introduced. One word or phrase may repeat itself again and again, and such repetition is particularly liable to occur in the early chapters of Dickens’s novels. Thomas Gradgrind (*Hard Times*) is a good example. Dickens uses “square” five times to describe his appearance:

“The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker’s square forefinger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster’s sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s square wall of a forehead, [...]The speaker’s obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders, – nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was, – all helped the emphasis.”¹⁰⁵

Repetition is a simple but effective skill to build impressive characters and this technique is closely related to humorous effect. As G.L.Brook argues:

“A commonplace idea becomes funny if it is repeated often enough. It maybe, however, that part of the secret of Dickens’s success is that he makes things easy for his readers by his constant repetitions, and his habitual phrases are remembered by readers who are not used to reading with close attention. Such repetition gives pleasure to unsophisticated readers and audiences because it

ziliao (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 289.

¹⁰⁴ George Orwell, “Charles Dickens”, in George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, vol.1), 430.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995), 3.

reminds them of other amusing contexts in which the phrase has been used.”¹⁰⁶

In fact, the repetition of habitual gestures and phrases has been used in many forms of art. Team Rocket from the Pokémon anime is a modern example. Jessie, James and a talking Meowth (a kind of pokemon) are a trio of Team Rocket field agents. As main antagonists in the anime, they nearly appear in every episode and they have a particular prologue whenever they appear on the scene:

“Prepare for trouble, and make it double! To protect the world from devastation,
to unite all people within our nation. To denounce the evil of truth and love, to
extend our reach to the stars of above. Jessie! James! Team Rocket blast off at
the speed of light! Surrender now or prepare to fight! Meowth, that’s right!”¹⁰⁷

They notably start speaking in this rhyme from time to time and barely change. With their constant repetitions, an audience can recognise them easily from the first word they say and follow their lyrics. Team Rocket always say the lyrics whenever someone asks who they are. The question seems like a trigger, Team Rocket cannot refuse its temptation. The whole process is just like an operational mechanism, Team Rocket uses the prologue regardless of whatever condition they are in, positive or negative, which achieves a ludicrous effect. In addition, from a psychological perspective, there may be an element of self-congratulation in the satisfaction with which an audience recognises a habitual phrase. Thus, after a certain amount of repetition, the habitual phrase becomes a routine, but an audience would like to hear such a boring prologue, as he is pleased to think like this: I know they will say it, I know!

Repetition does work for establishing characters. The content, habitual actions and phrases, Dickens choose to repeat is tricky. With his peculiar power of taking hold of some particular traits, Dickens makes characters unique and impressive. Whenever a household name has been mentioned, the corresponding character is recalled, shows his recognisable appearance, performs his distinguished signature move, expression and says his habitual phrase. We could find countless figures with their

¹⁰⁶ G.L.Brook, *The Language of Dickens* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1970), 143, 144.

¹⁰⁷ *Pocket Monsters* TV series, 1997.

labels in Dickens's novels: Thomas Gradgrind's (*Hard Times*) label is "eminently practical" (Dickens uses this phrase nine times in the text); Jack Dawkins (*Oliver Twist*), better known as the Artful Dodger; Mr. Peggotty (*David Copperfield*), who is a good and honest man, always saying "You'll find us rough, sir, but you'll find us ready"¹⁰⁸; Mrs Defarge (*A Tale of Two Cities*), who is always knitting as if erasing her enemies from existence; Miss Havisham (*Great Expectations*) who "was dressed in rich materials-satins, and lace, and silks-all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white"¹⁰⁹, and her heart is white too and so forth.

A habitual action or phrase becomes the 'signature tune' by which a character can be recognized. Habitual actions and phrases acquire a special meaning for the character who uses them. In a Dickens novel, it is usually clear quite soon after the introduction of a new character what his habitual phrase is, if he has one. The purpose of repetitive actions and phrases is individualizing the character in a way that is easy to recognize. So normally, they are quite simple, funny and easy to remember. These figures are highly memorable, although they seem untrue, simple and distorted compared with real people, but they have eternal artistic fascination.

When we talk about what is "real", Dickens's characters have high levels of distortion. Most of Dickens's characters can hardly be thought of as human beings, they are "monsters" (George Orwell's word). Henry James complained that

"It were, in our opinion, an offence against humanity to place Mr Dickens among the greatest novelists. For, to repeat what we have already intimated, he has created nothing but figures. He has added nothing to our understanding of human character."¹¹⁰

The most obvious display of the unreal characters is that they are always static; they are also called "flat characters". The characters were divided into flat and round by E.M. Forster, who suggests that:

¹⁰⁸ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1992), 30.

¹⁰⁹ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965), 87.

¹¹⁰ Henry James, "Review of *Our Mutual Friend*", *Nation*, vol.1, 1865, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 167.

“The really flat character can be expressed in one sentence such as ‘I never will desert Mr Micawber.’ There is Mrs Micawber – she says she won’t desert Mr Micawber; she doesn’t, and there she is...Dickens’s people are nearly all flat (Pip and David Copperfield attempt roundness, but so diffidently that they seem more like bubbles than solids). Nearly everyone can be summed up in a sentence, and yet there is this wonderful feeling of human depth.”¹¹¹

Such as Mr. Pickwick, who is an entirely static character, G.K. Chesterton had remarked on him that “If we had a sequel of Pickwick ten years afterwards, Pickwick would be exactly the same age.”¹¹²

However, to other authors, there is also the most untouchable skill of writing – powerful imagination. Some critics celebrate this point against those critics who overlook or undervalue it: “it is not because the characters are badly drawn and their language unreal [...] His peculiarity is not the incorrectness of the drawing, but the vividness of the imagination”¹¹³ and G.K. Chesterton even reckons that: “Dickens did not strictly make a literature; he made a mythology [...] Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the mythologists, and perhaps the greatest.”¹¹⁴

Therefore, it might be true that although Dickens’s figures are unreal, they have greater intensity than real human beings. So, after categorizing Dickens’s characters as flat ones, Forster had to say that:

“Part of the genius of Dickens is that he does use types and caricatures [...] his immense success with types suggests that there may be more in flatness than the severer critics admit.”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, chapter 4, 1927, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 277.

¹¹² G.K. Chesterton, “Charles Dickens”, 1906, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 245.

¹¹³ George Henry Lewes, “Dickens in Relation to Criticism”, *Fortnightly Review*, vol.17, 1872, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 199.

¹¹⁴ G.K. Chesterton, “Charles Dickens”, 1906, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 246.

¹¹⁵ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, chapter 4, 1927, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology*

If we say that Zhang absorbs the advantages of Dickens's character description skills, we have to also acknowledge that they also share the related limitations. When we look back on Zhang's works, we find out that most of Zhang's characters are, like Dickens's characters, without a development in their characterisation and are thus 'flat characters'.

In those flat characters in Zhang's fiction, we see no process or calculation. When these characters appear in the text, their personalities have been decided and never change. We cannot map the development of the characters' psychological states; they are conclusions that have been drawn by the author at the very beginning.

Just like Dickens, Zhang observes his characters with static eyes, usually shaping some specific personalities but now allowing them to engage with the extensive space of human thought. Zhang once admitted this drawback: "The weakness of my creation is that the descriptions of characters, which only serve the theme of my stories, I tend to ignore their complicated human nature."¹¹⁶ This is the reason why Zhang's characters often have less depth and are distorted. Humans are complex. We can find humanity and animality shown in Tolstoy's characters to a different extent; Tolstoy's characters change repeatedly and these characters are more real humans. Dostoevsky explores the secret and unpredictable innermost world of human beings. The avoidance of this is a weakness that Dickens and Zhang share. They both see people simply and statically; in fact, the archetypal characters are more beautiful, diverse and complicated than they describe.

This similarity in writing technique derives from their similar temperament as a "caricaturist". Both of them can portray the important part of a picture rapidly, precisely and in detail. In addition, they share a powerful imagination; indeed, this power makes their imaginations become like tyrants, restricting and blinding. They are prone to constant repetition of little traits and ignore other, less superficial aspects of the subject. Dickens and Zhang frequently use various exaggerating

(Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 278.

¹¹⁶ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Autobiographical sketch" (Zixu xiaozhuan 自敘小傳), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuangzuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 12.

forms to present these traits and thus dazzle their readers and make them convulse with laughter. These little traits make a considerable impact on readers' mind and make themselves unforgettable. This is the core element of both Dickens and Zhang's writing style.

Section IV: Humour and Satire

1. Zhang Tianyi's Humour

Throughout Republican era Chinese literature, ironic literature is relatively sparse, as compared to other genres. The main reason might be the influence of Chinese social ethical morality. Confucianism, as a chief source of traditional Chinese culture, tends to embrace moderation and mildness, which perhaps accounts for a less developed taste for ironic literature. In Republican China, satirists were few; the works of Lu Xun, Lao She, Zhang Tianyi and Sha Ding represent practically the entire body of Republican Chinese ironic literature.

Humour and satire are the main styles of Zhang's literary works. C.T Hsia argues that "We may divide Chang T'ien-i's stories into three categories: agitational, ideological, and satiric...The best stories fall under the category of satire."¹¹⁷ As with Zhang's core idea of creation, satire is the lifeblood of his writing. It is clear that there are countless sharply satirical elements in Zhang's works, which reveal distorted personalities and social darkness. Zhang once described the relationship between humour and satire: "humour and satire are like brothers"¹¹⁸. He does, however, consider that the scope of humour is less than that of satire, believe that humour must be true while satire may be false. Humour exposes ostensible disguises and shows authentic shortcomings. Humour destroys hypocrisy with laughter, Hypocrisy may be something you do not acknowledge and have become used to, but when it is pointed out bluntly to you, then you will laugh.

Zhang is very good at depicting the funny actions and oral language of people in daily life. He uses various means to attain humorous effect. They can be categorised as follows:

(1) Misusing technical terms

¹¹⁷ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 221.

¹¹⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "What is humor" (Shenme shi youmo 什麼是幽默), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuanguo* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 109.

Zhang likes using some technical terms to describe irrelevant matters, which is known as malapropism. This technique is a staple method of creating humour and may be commonly found in Zhang's works. For example, in "Leather Belt" (Pidai 皮帶, 1937), Deng Bingsheng 鄧炳生 is a small-time civil servant who always want to get a promotion. Here are two conversations between Deng and his colleagues after he gets promoted.

"As they were eating porridge, Deng Bingsheng asked Xue Shoufa 薛收發: 'According to your policy, which one do you think is good: the trend for salted duck eggs or the trend for preserved eggs?' 'Sorry? I don't understand.' 'Why?' Bingsheng asked with contempt, 'I thought you would definitely understand my plan.' And he asked secretary Xiao (Xiao Shuji 蕭書記) at office: 'Has your wife really come here?' 'Yes.' 'Will you change your main emphasis from work to family?' The other one answered: 'That would be fine.' 'Well, an able person should do more work.'"¹¹⁹

In these conversations, "policy" (zheng ce 政策), "trends" (xingshi 形勢), "plan" (jihua 計劃), "scope" (fanwei 範圍) and "main emphasis" (zhuyao qiangdiao 主要強調) are political terms and supposed to be used on formal occasions. Here Zhang uses them in conversation in daily life to modify trivial items like "salted duck eggs" and "preserved eggs", etc. This kind of mismatching and incorrect use of words produces a comic effect. Here, "policy" should be "experience", "trends" should be "taste", but Zhang deliberately misuses them to achieve the humorous effect. Through the ludicrous statements of Bingsheng, he is exposed as a petty bureaucrat who just got a promotion and has become complacent.

(2) Incongruity

Zhang's characters tend to say things that are incongruous to their thoughts or actions, and accordingly, Zhang places the characters in ridiculous and ironic situations, and has them denying themselves. As a result, this incongruity presents distinct traits of characters and achieves a markedly humorous style through

¹¹⁹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Leather Belt" (Pidai 皮帶), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 142,143.

characters mocking themselves.

One fine example is Bao Guowei 包國維 in “Bao Father and Son” (Baoshi fuzi 包氏父子, 1934). Bao throws his weight around with his father, speaks and acts unreasonably, just because he bears his father’s dream of becoming an official. In the school, he chases girls and acts arrogantly. However, Bao Guowei becomes a different person when he is in the presence of his rich classmate Guo Chun 郭純. He sits down under Guo Chun and even has to consider the feigning different expressions, depending on Guo Chun’s meaningful glance: “Do I have to laugh a little while again?”¹²⁰ Such an obvious incongruity reveals the distortion of his state of mind, as well as his despicable soul. He is nothing but a vile person who knees to the rich.

In “The Bulwark” (Dizhu 砥柱, 1936), Huang Yi’an 黃宜庵 is a famous advocate of Neo-Confucianism in the county. His defences of the traditional Chinese moral system and endless talk of virtue and morality build his fame. When he finds his daughter talking with a bare-chested, breastfeeding mother, he burns with a frenzy of rage and gives his daughter a piece of his mind. Then, Huang Yi’an shows the opposite side of his personality. He appreciates “the great and white breasts of the breastfeeding mother with his grey, dead fish-like eyes, which made his mouth water”.¹²¹ Also, Huang goes to the next cabin and talks about the whorehouse and some secret experiences with his like-minded friends. A falsehood and a truth are presented in tandem; this sharp contrast deepens the ironic effect. It shows Zhang’s deep reflection on the flaws of the Chinese national spirit. Huang’s behavior is not consistent with his opinion and this is the national incorrigibility that most Chinese people share, according to Zhang.

In “A Loose Love Story” (Xisong de lian’ai gushi 稀鬆的戀愛故事), Zhu Lie 朱列 and Luomiu 羅繆 are on a date in the park. Luomiu is described as: “seeing lots of men wearing some kind of formal gown and running around with their women. The poet

¹²⁰ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Bao Father and Son” (Baoshi fuzi 包氏父子), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.2 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 21.

¹²¹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “The Bulwark” (Dizhu 砥柱), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.3 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 271-277.

murmurs: 'I'm sick of such people. Vulgar! They don't understand life.' 'Beware, they could hear us,' Zhu Lie says. 'Don't be afraid!' He says, quieter, 'Let's go.'" ¹²² Obviously, Luomiu is afraid that the people he despises will hear what he said, but he pretends that he does not care. This kind of hypocrisy shows the ambivalent and absurd traits of the characters.

In "Counter-attack" (*Fangong* 反攻), Cheng Yeheng confiscates the property of Li Tianjun, when he finds hundreds of black jars. He is told by Li Tianjun's assistant that these jars were sealed with countless demons and ghosts inside. "Don't touch, don't touch it! My lord, don't touch it at all!"... 'If you open them, those demons will run away and bring about fires, floods, or plagues...' 'I don't believe you!' Cheng Yeheng says and laughs. But he becomes nervous and a shiver runs through his body."¹²³ Cheng Yeheng is definitely scared of letting the demons out, showing he is not a real atheist. This incongruity discloses his weakness and duplicity.

(3) Antiphrasis

Antiphrasis is a rhetorical device that Zhang uses frequently. By reversing the meaning of words, he achieves a comic effect. In "Photograph" (*Zhaoxiang* 照相), Miss Su 素 says: "What a good shop, what a good shop!"¹²⁴ after she has endured a series of unfortunate experiences during the process of taking a photograph. Actually, "good" means bad here, as Miss Su uses it to mock the photo studio. In "On the Journey" (*Zai lü tu zhong* 在旅途中), Chen Jiyu 陳季漁 meets Ji San Zuanzi 計三鉗子, who is bullying some countrymen on a train. Chen Jiyu then remembers that he had punished Ji San Zuanzi once before, because of Ji's embezzlement of a disaster relief fund. Chen says: "I remember your contribution."¹²⁵ Zhang uses "contribution" here to express the meaning of his crime. Zhang causes amusement by through irony and using a word in a context in which its intended meaning becomes the total opposite of its usual meaning.

¹²² Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "A Loose Love Story" (Xisong de lianai gushi 稀鬆的戀愛故事), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 163.

¹²³ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Counter-attack" (*Fangong* 反攻), *Ibid.*, 456,457.

¹²⁴ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Photo-taking" (*Zhaoxiang* 照相), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.3 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 331.

¹²⁵ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "On the Journey" (*Zai lü tu zhong* 在旅途中), *Ibid.*, 342.

In addition, Zhang tends to use antiphrasis in forming titles. Examples include “An Ordinary Thing” (Yijian xunchang shi 一件尋常事), “Reunion” (Tuanyuan 團圓), “A Female Buddhist Devotee” (Shan nüren, 善女人), “The Power of Buddha” (Pusa de weili 菩薩的威力), “Friendship” (Youyi 友誼), “Almsdeed” (Shanju 善舉), “The Bulwark”, “Measurement” (Duliang 度量), “Serious Life” (Yansu de shenghuo 嚴肅的生活), “Reason” (Jiangli 講理), “The Night of Honey” (Miwei de ye 蜜味的夜), “Spring Breeze” (Chunfeng 春風), “New Life” (Xinsheng “新生”), “War Hawk” (Zhuzhan zhe 主戰者), “Confidant” (Zhiji 知己). All these titles seemingly contradict their content. This technique aims to create unique, humorous and satirical effects, and encourages readers to think.

(4) Humorous use of solemn words

In some cases, Zhang prefers to use solemn words in incompatible circumstances; this achieves an ironic effect. In “From Emptiness to Fullness” (Cong kongxu dao chongshi 從空虛到充實, 1929), Mr. Jingye 荊野 is going to Shanghai and his two friends accompany him to the railway station.

“‘I hope you take good care of yourself,’ the little old man says, backslapping Mr. Jingye’s shoulder. ‘The burden of the human race depends on your health.’ ‘Sure, I appreciate your blessings.’”¹²⁶

Mr. Jingye is nobody, but the little old man tells him to take care of himself and to bear the burden of the human race; this ridiculous statement mocks the empty life and mental state of Mr. Jingye and seems ludicrous.

Similarly, in “Little Peter” (Xiao Bide 小彼得, 1931), the Boss’s pet, a dog named Little Peter, was injured by workers. Then, “With Christian love, the boss is applying ointment and wrapping gauze, then putting a styptic plaster on the wound.”¹²⁷ Generally, Christian love refers to mankind’s love. The boss loves his dog like Jesus loves people, but he treats his employees cruelly, which means the workers are not equal to a dog. This tremendous contrast has a strong satirical effect. Finally, the

¹²⁶ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “From Emptiness to Fullness” (Cong kongxu dao chongshi 從空虛到充實), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 70.

¹²⁷ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Little Peter” (Xiao Bide 小彼得), *Ibid.*, 124.

workers kill Little Peter as an expression of their anger towards their boss. They discuss:

“Hey guys, let’s hold a memorial ceremony for it. Ready, bow, bow again, once more. Let’s take a five minutes’ silence...” ‘Hell, I’ve heard of the three minutes’ silence, nothing of the five minutes’ silence.’ ‘What’s wrong? ...’ ‘I’ll bet! Do you believe Peter will go to heaven?’”¹²⁸

The boss treats Peter more like a human being than his employees. Accordingly, these workers kill Peter and then sarcastically treat the pet like a human, just like their boss. This satire exposes the contradiction between capitalists and labourers.

In “Leather Belt”, Bingsheng meets Lieutenant Liang 梁 and observes his

“...oblique leather belt. The symbol is three stars with blue selvedge, three stars!... All these impressions cause Bingsheng to feel that Lieutenant Liang is pretty great. Lieutenant Liang is a Captain: the best of the company’s officers. This greatness is comparable with Mr. Bingsheng: he might be a Captain in this life.... His uncle is a division chief, definitely greater. But this greatness is far from his reach, which suggests Mr. Bingsheng doesn’t think he can be a division chief anyway.”¹²⁹

As we can see here, Bingsheng has a great longing for these small positions like Captain and division chief: all of his pathetic daydreams and ludicrous flattery are fully highlighted by four “greats” (weida 偉大 in the original text) here. Zhang uses the solemn word “great” to describe these insignificant positions and as such, produces a strong sense of irony.

(5) Leaps in text through ellipses

Zhang Tianyi often uses deliberate misquotation with comic effect. Many characters in Zhang’s fiction are ignorant but pretend to be knowledgeable. Zhang usually

¹²⁸ Ibid., 127.

¹²⁹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Leather Belt”(Pidai 皮帶), Ibid., 131.

makes the text disconnected and uses disjointed phrases to let the characters show off but speak vaguely, thus making fools of themselves. In “After Moving House” (Ban jia hou 搬家後), Da Kun 大坤 scolds some teachers, among them one male teacher who is mocking the poor wild children:

“These children are awful...future rogues...all of them will be rogues. Their parents don’t control them at all....[...].... It is not that we despise them, the truth is they are bad to the core. In fact, I have always been an egalitarian....We must be careful, do not let our students approach these people, Confucius said... Mozi said... Mencius said...”¹³⁰

This male teacher likes citing quotations from Confucius, Mozi and Mencius; however, he merely mentions the name and provides no specific statements. The three ellipses vividly symbolise his embarrassment at his ignorance, and rather ironically, he is a teacher. As a result, this leap in dialogue creates a deep irony.

Indeed, Zhang uses a large amount of ellipses in dialogue. In “A Loose Love Story”, Luomiu says: “I remember that there was a cook in Japan... no! That is the name of his village.”¹³¹ Luomiu often quotes a Japanese literary critic named Kuriyagawa Hakuson (廚川白村) when he talks about love. He cannot remember the critic’s name but only the character “廚” (chu means “to cook” in Chinese), which is only part of the critic’s full name. He mentions the critic again in the following pages:

“We need richer lives, we do not only need material possessions. For instance, this wine bottle, this glove, this glove, glove... no, I mean this is my opinion, I am not contradicting you. I consider all things in this way, like dining, drinking, love and everything in the world. There is a cook in Japan...”¹³²

This irrelevant statement and the use of ellipsis again enhances the irony. In some cases, Zhang even continually use ellipses to make detached phrases and to show the character’s foolish talking. In “Fatalism and Fortune-telling”, Lao You 老遊 said:

¹³⁰ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “After Moving House”(Ban jia hou 搬家後), Ibid., 79.

¹³¹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “A Loose Love Story” (Xisong de lianai gushi 稀鬆的戀愛故事), Ibid., 162.

¹³² Ibid., 165,166.

"I despise most those who betray their friends...There are of all the things that you ought not to betray, why would you betray your friend! ...Jesus had a disciple, called You (猶)...You...You...called Jew (Youtai 猶太, he meant to say Judas (You Da 猶大), Judas is written similar to Jew in Chinese)... Didn't Jew betray Jesus for only a little money? And Jew came to no good: Jew destroyed the nation... And Egypt, also vanquished... A man who betrays his friend can cause his state's destruction. You see! ... So they say when a state is perishing, there must be some demons...must be demons... they are the cause of ruin! Everybody has the right to punish these people!... Traitors who betray their friends don't have strong characters and will definitely come to no good... You see, Jew!... And Egypt, Egypt, and South America..."¹³³

These ellipses repeatedly highlight Lao You's absurdity. He is not only poor in expression, but his logic is also ridiculous. Therefore, these leaps in dialogue create irony.

(6) Unique hyperbole

Exaggeration is a common technique for establishing humour and satire. However, Zhang has a distinct way of exaggerating objects: through the use of numerous quantifiers.

In "From Emptiness to Fullness", although Mr. Jingye was imprisoned, he felt that things were getting better. "But suddenly, his good feelings vanished, just like thousands of lights extinguished immediately."¹³⁴ Then he is told that Ge Ping 戈平 has died in the night, which resulted in "a hundred different feelings dancing before him."¹³⁵ When he was finally released from prison, "his nerves had declined one hundred and forty-four percent".¹³⁶ In "Three Brothers" (San Dixiong 三弟兄), as Wang Qi 王琪 is reading a newspaper, he is "creating seven or eight wrinkles on his

¹³³ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Fatalism and Fortune-telling"(Suming lun yu suanming lun 宿命論與算命論), Ibid., 273, 274.

¹³⁴ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "From Emptiness to Fullness" (Cong kongxu dao chongshi 從空虛到充實), Ibid., 59.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 61.

forehead.”¹³⁷ In “Little Peter”, the dog Peter was hurt by workers: “It cannot talk, but knows everything. If it could talk, it could now say two thousand sad sentences without difficulty.”¹³⁸ In “Leather Belt”, Bingsheng is going to take up a job, but he feels “three hundred centipedes are crawling on his heart.”¹³⁹ When he is fired, “the powerful weight of hundreds of thousands of jin pressed down on Mr. Bingsheng.”¹⁴⁰ In “Twenty-One” (Ershiyi ge 二十一箇), the soldiers curse their commander’s “thirty-six generations of ancestors.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, at the end of “A Loose Love Story”, there is a calculation of the costs of building a relationship:

“One hundred and thirty-four boxes of chocolate, twenty-seven bottles of sweet wine, twice weekly visits to the public park, watching movies four times a week, having a picnic sixty-six times, sixty-nine lyric poems, and two hundred restaurant meals. Total cost: one thousand and five hundred silver dollars. Total time spent: twelve thousand, three hundred and eighty-four hours. These amounts do not even contain wedding costs.”¹⁴²

Obviously, all of these exaggerated statistics produce a strong ironic effect; they reduce the use of adjectives but leave a deep impression on the reader’s mind. But sometimes, using quantifiers repeatedly may seem too monotonous and so this method became relatively rare in Zhang’s later works.

As Wu Fuhui has stated: “If being evaluated from the perspectives of satirical attitude, temperament, emotion and feelings, Zhang Tianyi’s works are inclined to those of Dickens.”¹⁴³ Zhang was skillful in depicting the personalities of ridiculous people in life and embroidering their characterisation with ridiculous behaviours and languages. In doing this, he also echoes some satirical methods commonly used in Dickens’s novels.

¹³⁷ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Three Brothers” (San Dixiong 三弟兄). Ibid., 98.

¹³⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Little Peter” (Xiao Bide 小彼得), Ibid., 124.

¹³⁹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Leather Belt” (Pidai 皮帶), Ibid., 137.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 145.

¹⁴¹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Twenty-One” (Ershiyi 二十一). Ibid., 148.

¹⁴² Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “A Loose Love Story” (Xisong de lianai gushi 稀鬆的戀愛故事), Ibid., 173.

¹⁴³ Wu Fuhui 吳福輝, “Zhang Tianyi’s novel and the Chinese and western satirical literary tradition” (Zhang Tianyi de xiaoshuo he zhongwai fengci wenxue chuantong 張天翼的小說和中外諷刺文學傳統), in Wu, Huang and Shen, eds. *Zhang Tianyi lun* (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1987), 83.

2. Dickens's Humour

Charles Dickens's biographer John Forster declared in 1872 that Dickens was "one of the greatest humourists that England has produced."¹⁴⁴ And as R.H. Horne points out: "Certainly not the highest, but certainly the most prominent characteristic of Mr. Dickens's mind, is his humour."¹⁴⁵ We can say humour is a key characteristic for Dickens; the comic temperament nearly runs through all of his works. Dickens's overflowing fun is one of the most important contributions to his claim to greatness. As George Henry Lewes notes, even his most uncompromising opponents have to admit this skill: "They may be ashamed of their laughter, but they laugh."¹⁴⁶

Dickensian humour is particularly idiosyncratic, the features of which can be divided into five categories:

(1) Incongruity

In effect, incongruity is a key stimulant for Dickensian humour. Dickens knows well the excellent humorous effect of incongruity: the sudden combination of objects and circum-stances which are not usually associated together, or irrelevant behavior and thought. "I think it is my infirmity to fancy or perceive relations in things are not apparent generally... To perceive relations in things which are not apparent generally, is one of those exquisite properties of humour..."¹⁴⁷ he once wrote in a letter. Therefore, incongruity is fundamental to Dickens's humorous technique.

A good example comes from *David Copperfield*. Mr. Micawber is in debt, so there are always some creditors arriving to collect their money.

"At these times Mr. Micawber would be transported with grief and mortification, even to the length (as I was once made aware by a scream from his wife) of making motions at himself with a razor; but within half an hour afterwards, he

¹⁴⁴ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872, vol.1), 1.

¹⁴⁵ R.H. Horne, "Charles Dickens", 1844, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 72.

¹⁴⁶ George Henry Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism", *Fortnightly Review*, vol.17 February 1872, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 193.

¹⁴⁷ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872, vol.3), 309.

would polish up his shoes with extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune with a greater air of gentility than ever. Mrs. Micawber was quite as elastic. I have known her to be thrown into fainting fits by the king's taxes at three o'clock, and to eat lamb chops breaded, and drink warm ale (paid for with two teaspoons that had gone to the pawnbroker's) at four."¹⁴⁸

And here is another one:

"It was nothing at all unusual for Mr. Micawber to sob violently at the beginning of one of these Saturday night conversations, and sing about Jack's delight being his lovely Nan, towards the end of it. I have known him come home to supper with a flood of tears, and a declaration that nothing was now left but a jail; and go to bed making a calculation of the expense of putting bow-windows to the house, 'in case anything turned up,' which was his favourite expression. And Mrs. Micawber was just the same."¹⁴⁹

Mr. Micawber is pushed by those creditors to the point of nearly committing suicide. However, just "half an hour afterwards", to everyone's surprise, he polishes up his shoes very carefully, acting like nothing has happened. This abrupt juxtaposition makes the scene so funny. The abrupt transition of Mr. Micawber's action shows that he is a radical optimist, he believes that "something will turn up", like he always says, which is his famous habitual phrase. One can easily figure out the personality of Mr. Micawber, as well as his wife Mrs. Micawber, through the incongruity of their successive actions. This incongruity triggers the laugh. Dickens deliberately juxtaposes their grief and joy (sobbing at first then singing songs soon after) to produce the comic effect; this kind of unexpected feature frequently appears in his works and is a chief source of Dickensian humour.

(2) Antiphrasis

Antiphrasis is also one of the prime triggers of Dickensian humour and irony. Dickens especially likes using a word or phrase in improper circumstances which are contrary

¹⁴⁸ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992), 151,152.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 155.

to its normal meaning for ironic or humorous effect.

In *David Copperfield*, little David goes into a hotel. The waiter serves him some pork ribs and vegetables and talks to him amiably: “Now, six-foot! Come on!”¹⁵⁰ Obviously, little David is only a child, far from six-foot height, so this antiphrasis is a well-meaning scoff, making him relaxed in a new place. This improper use of “six-foot” also produces a comic effect.

Dickens also employs antiphrasis repeatedly to mock the social system and injustice in *Oliver Twist*. The famous text below is filled with antiphrasis:

“The workhouse authorities replied with humility, that where was not. Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be ‘farmed’,[...] without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week. Sevenpence-halfpenny’s worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny: quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. [...] Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still; and proving herself a very great experimental philosopher.”¹⁵¹

At first, “The workhouse authorities replied with humility”. The original meaning of “humility” is modesty, but the workhouse actually refuses to raise Oliver Twist, so “humility” is a deep irony to mock the merciless workhouse. Then “the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved” is another use of antiphrasis; “magnanimously and humanely” definitely meaning “cruelly” here. After this, Dickens uses “inconvenience”, modifying “too much food or too much clothing”. Obviously, the lack of food and clothing is supposed to be trouble, but the parish authorities regard “too much food or too much clothing” as an “inconvenience”, and they don’t

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵¹ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Macmillan And Co., 1892), 4.

need to worry about that “inconvenience”. This antiphrasis satirises the heartless cruelty of the parish authorities. In such harsh survival conditions, those poor children are “under the parental superintendence of an elderly female”; this “parental” female considers that Sevenpence-halfpenny’s worth per week is a “good round diet” for a child, for it can get “a great deal” of stuff, and “enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable”. Due to her knowing what is “good for children”, she “appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use”, by doing this, she makes herself a “great experimental philosopher”.

These antiphrases mentioned above shape a cruel old woman who gains advantage by reducing the tiny stipend of the orphans under her care. She cares for nothing but her own profits; in this respect, she tries her best and thus making herself a “great experimental philosopher”. The massive usage of antiphrasis produces a very strong humorous and ironic effect. This amuses the reader but also makes them abhor the inhumane workhouse and the parish authorities, as well as that elderly female. It is antiphrasis which makes Dickens’s irony deeper, more impressive and powerful. If Dickens did not use antiphrasis in the paragraph above, it would be a long and boring complaint of the incompetent workhouse and the old woman. Therefore, antiphrasis is an important component part of Dickensian humour and irony.

(3) Humorous use of solemn words

Dickens also likes using solemn words to describe ill-suited objects in order to produce humorous effect. At the beginning of *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens uses numerous solemn words to describe the establishment of Pickwick club.

“[...] Pickwick Club, [...] with which his search among the multifarious documents confided to him has been conducted.

‘May 12, 1827. Joseph Smiggers, Esq., P.V.P. M.P.C presiding. The following resolutions unanimously agreed to.

‘That this Association has heard read, with feelings of unmingled satisfaction [...]

‘That while this Association is deeply sensible of the advantages which must accrue to the cause of science, [...] ‘That the members of the aforesaid Corresponding Society, be, and are, hereby informed, that their proposal to pay the postage of their letters, and the carriage of their parcels, has been deliberated upon, by this Association. That this Association considers such proposal worthy of the great minds from which it emanated; and that it hereby signifies its perfect acquiescence therein.’”¹⁵²

Technically this is a meeting record and Dickens uses a lot of official jargon such as “docu-ment”, “conduct”, “preside”, “resolution”, “association”, “approval”, “proposal”, “sanction”, “authenticate”, “investigation”, “acquiescence”, etc. These formal terms are usually used to record conferences, congresses or parliament, and Dickens uses over 500 words to show detail of this small meeting. But actually, all the content of this meeting deciding is that the Pickwick Club (containing only four members) is constituted, and every member of the club should defray his own travelling expenses, the postage of his letters, and the carriage of his parcels. Dickens employs such a serious and formal vocabulary to describe an insignificant meeting of a civil organization; it is like using antiaircraft guns to fight mosquitoes and this triggers the laugh.

Another example comes when Mr. Pickwick finds a small broken stone during his journey. Dickens depicts this discovery:

“It was at this moment that Mr. Pickwick made that immortal discovery [...] (he)fall on his knees before the little stone, and commence wiping the dust off it with his pocket-handkerchief. [...] The exultation and joy of the Pickwickians knew no bounds, when their patience and assiduity, their washing and scraping, were crowned with success. [...] And to this day the stone remains an illegible monument of Mr. Pickwick’s greatness, and a lasting trophy of the littleness of his enemies.”¹⁵³

Actually, the inscription on the stone is carved by a worker in an “idle mood”. Dickens

¹⁵² Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1999), 15, 16.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 147, 148, 157, 158.

uses so many strict words, which are usually used for scientific papers or court records, to describe such a ridiculous discovery. This mode, the deliberate use of solemn words to describe inappropriate objects, obtains a strong comic effect.

(4) Leaps in text through ellipses

A few of Dickens's characters have dialogue containing ellipses or dashes, which disconnect the text. This strategy reveals the characters' humorous traits and produces ironic effects.

A very fine example is Alfred Jingle in *The Pickwick Papers*, who is a strolling actor, charlatan, and a fraud. He has a unique speaking style – using intermittent phrases. His first appearance is in Chapter Two of the novel sees him accompanying the Pickwickians on their coach journey. He shows up with an incoherent speech for rescuing Pickwickians from a siege:

“take yourself off-respectable gentleman,-know him well-none of your nonsense-
this way, Sir-where's your friends?-all a mistake, I see-never mind-accidents will
happen-best regulated families-never say die-down upon your luck-pull him up-
put that in his pipe-like the flavour-damned rascals'. [...] 'glasses round,-brandy
and water, hot and strong, and sweet, and plenty,-eye damaged, sir? Waiter; raw
beef-steak for the gentleman's eye,-nothing like raw beef-steak for a bruise, Sir;
cold lamp-post very good, but lamp-post inconvenient- damned odd standing in
the open street half an hour, with your eye against a lamp-post-eh, -very good-
ha!ha!'...'enough,-no more; smart chap that cabman-handled his fives well; but if
I'd been your friend in the green jimmy-damn me-punch his head,-'cod I would,-
pig's whisper-pieman too,-no gammon.”¹⁵⁴

Mr. Jingle always speaks with this kind of broken sentences, which are structured without principal and subordinate clauses. In Malcolm Andrews's words, “Jingle's speech is a linguistic variation on the fragmented body image. It never stops long enough to settle into a coherent shape.”¹⁵⁵ Mr. Jingle speaks in fragments, and these

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 24, 25, 26.

¹⁵⁵ Malcolm Andrews, “Falling Apart Laughing”, in *Dickensian Laughter: Essays on Dickens and Humour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92.

fragments are juxtaposed without a clear connection. But this kind of disconnected speech also shows his eloquence and versatility, and Pickwickians take his words very seriously and respectfully. This “fracturing of standard speech patterning and sudden eruption of grotesquerie is very funny, especially, on the incongruity principle, when conducted before strait-laced, literal-minded innocents”.¹⁵⁶ This disjointed mode is similar to Lao You’s speech in “Fatalism and Fortune-telling”, which uses a similar talking style.

(5) Melodramatic representation

Melodrama is an aesthetic mode of heightened dramatisation. The connotations of the word include:

“the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety.”¹⁵⁷

This genre has nothing to do with the monotony of daily life but is highly-focused on the grandiose conflict between good and evil. It is full of rhetorical excess, moral claims and unusual human suffering. Also, the melodramatic style is hostile to realism and naturalism “because these modes of representation do not allow the narrative to ‘break through’ to the plane on which moral polarities are visibly at war.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, the conflict in melodramatic mode always ends up with the “unconvincing-triumphs”¹⁵⁹ of good.

In Dickens’s novels, we can easily identify some core elements of melodrama. The first one of these is moral polarisation. In Dickens’s works, there is nearly no ambiguous moral middle-ground. The melodramatic good and evil are highly personalised and can be represented by relative characters in his novels. For example, Nell Trent (*The Old Curiosity Shop*), David Copperfield (*David Copperfield*),

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1976), 11, 12.

¹⁵⁸ Paul G. Pickowicz, *China on Film: A Century of Exploration, Confrontation, and Controversy* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 78.

¹⁵⁹ Juliet John, *Dickens’s Villains Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27.

Oliver Twist (*Oliver Twist*), Sissy Jupe (*Hard Times*) and Lucie Manette (*A Tale of Two Cities*) are representatives of goodness; Daniel Quilp (*The Old Curiosity Shop*), Uriah Heep (*David Copperfield*), Fagin (*Oliver Twist*), Josiah Bounderby (*Hard Times*) and Madame Defarge (*A Tale of Two Cities*) are representatives of evil. Almost all of Dickens's novels are about the persecution of innocence, and they end with the triumph of good (except *The Old Curiosity Shop*, in which Nell Trent dies in tragic circumstances). Those villains, thieves, murderers, frauds, brutes, sadists and hypocrites are all punished in the end without exception.

Thus, all evil is temporary in Dickens's novels. This is the stereotype of his works. A reader who is familiar with Dickens's works would feel funny when he sees villains doing evil acts because he knows that no evil will exist for long. As Malcolm Andrews argues: "Entertainment and moral conviction work together as comedy lifts the villainy into a sphere of ethical certainties, in which we can laugh heartily at the wickedness because we know it will be defeated."¹⁶⁰ Fagin is such an overt antagonist, teaching a group of children how to pick-pocket and other criminal activities. Oliver Twist is captured by him again and again, and he finally causes the death of Nancy. But the most important thing is that we know he will be destroyed eventually (he is hanged in the end of the novel). In Malcolm Andrews's words: "The brutality, wretched though it is, is temporary only."¹⁶¹ It is this major feature of melodrama which makes the brutality less brutal and even somewhat funny. That is why most of Dickens's villains' brutality has a humorous effect for their violence turns to a kind of farce. This is a technique which Zhang does not use, for sustaining the humorous mode when dealing with horrible violence of villains. Dickens makes the consequences of the violence seem less painful, or at least we do not notice the serious outcome.

Also, in order to punish the evil, Dickens sometimes like to use coincidence to achieve the outcome, this is also absent in Zhang's works. In fact, although both Zhang and Dickens share a humorous style, their humour is slightly different. Basically, Zhang uses humour as a weapon to help reveal the darkness of society

¹⁶⁰ Malcolm Andrews, "Staging Comic Anecdotes", in *Dickensian Laughter: Essays on Dickens and Humour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 41.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

and the irrationality of the social system. However, Dickensian humour is a shield to oppose the hard life in case it hurts too much. Dickens is a spokesman for the British petty bourgeoisie; he cries for their sorrow and anger and softens the furious storm in their hearts. Actually, Dickens is worried and indignant as he knows that there is no effective solution to improve the miserable situation of the lower middle-class. Therefore, Dickens places his hope on people's self-conscious emotions. All of his works advocate benevolence and love; he can find nothing but this illusory measure. Dickens's humour offers a rosy tint and softens the dreadful lines of the realistic life and thus softens people's pain.

In contrast, when Zhang emerged in the literary world, he rapidly turned into a leftist writer and saw literature as a weapon to fight against the darkness, rather than a balm to soothe the effects of that darkness. Zhang uses a fighting spirit to write; his humour is a call to arms to destroy the old world, which I will elaborate in section II of Chapter III. Zhang inherits and develops the art of traditional Chinese humour and satire, such as *The Scholars* (Rulin waishi 儒林外史), he once wrote a review of it¹⁶². He also absorbs some techniques of Dickensian humour like "incongruity", "antiphrasis", "humorous use of solemn words" and "leaps in text through ellipses", forms Zhang's unique artistic style of humour. This is his outstanding contribution to Republican Chinese literature.

¹⁶² Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "A review of 'The Scholars'" (du Rulin waishi 讀《儒林外史》), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.10 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 128-176.

Section V: Children's Perspectives

The publication of three short stories, "After Moving House" (1930), "Bees" (1932) and "Adventures" (Qiyu 奇遇, 1934) to *Big Lin and Small Lin* (*Dalin yu xiaolin* 大林與小林, 1932), *The King of the Bald* (*Tutu dawang* 禿禿大王, 1933), *The Empire of Golden Ducks* (*Jinya diguo* 金鴨帝國, 1942), and thereafter to the birth of "The Secret of the Magic Gourd" (*Bao hulu de mimi* 寶葫蘆的秘密), solidified Zhang Tianyi's reputation as one of the few Chinese children's literature writers in the Republican era. His representations of child psychology and fantastic imagination are again echoes from Dickens.

Zhang Tianyi was quite familiar with children, which is embodied in his use of children's gaze, childish language, childlike imagination and psychological descriptions of children in his works. Zhang often tells stories from children's perspectives. "After Moving House" (published on *Mengya yuekan* 萌芽月刊, 1930) is Zhang's first work related to children. This short story is about a low-class family moving to a new house. The protagonist Da Kun mocks those upper-class people nearby, because he is too young to have class consciousness. This is the first appearance of a child's gaze in Zhang's work; the narrator sees the adult world through Da Kun's eyes and shows how strange and ridiculous it is. Da Kun despises the young master, madam, policemen and teacher, who are the upper class and authority of the adult world. This incongruity between the adult world and the children's world is the basis for the humour in the short story and works well in Zhang's children literature.

"Bees" is a short story which contains five letters written by a boy to his elder sister, mainly talking about his life in school and a protest launched by villagers against capitalism. The narration is vivid, humorous and natural, totally from a boy's point of view. In these letters, Zhang uses plenty of misspellings, childish language and jingles to imitate the actual speech of primary school students.

In order to report some events and conversations, the boy has to use words that he knows only orally but has not learned how to write. In these occasions (over 50

cases in the text), he has to borrow other words. A very fine example is “Japan has a Millionaire”¹⁶³ (literally Da fuweng 大富翁, Zhang uses 副 to replace 富, for the two characters share the same pronun-ciation) . No doubt, these misspellings are innocent mistakes on the boy’s part. When the boy cannot find an appropriate substitute for a word that he only knows its meaning, here is the situation:

“Teacher Xu 徐 likes me. She just gave me six pairs of things – they are useful – I don’t know how to write the word. These items are long, for wearing on my feet, and they are black but not shoes. Do you know what I mean, sister? I will say it again: long, black, for the feet, but not shoes.”¹⁶⁴

Obviously, these items are socks. This prolix description enhances the authenticity of the point of view of a little boy. Moreover, due to his insufficient education, the boy sometimes uses words that he does not fully understand. For example, the boy reports the speech of the county magistrate: “I always ‘harm and enslave my people’ (hai min nuzi 害民奴子)”.¹⁶⁵ This is an idiom which is supposed to be “love my people like my own sons” (ai min ruzi 愛民如子), but he writes it incorrectly. The incongruity between the words he uses in a particular context and the original meaning of the words produces a funny and satirical effect. Another example is in the second letter: “Teacher Xu is prettier than she was in the ancient time (gu shihou 古時候)”¹⁶⁶ He was supposed to use “the former time” (congqian 從前) here. Interestingly, when his sister corrects him in her reply, he disproves her argument in the beginning of the third letter: “Was ‘the ancient time’ wrongly used? However, Mr. Luo 羅 told us that ‘there was a king in the ancient time’ equals ‘Formerly there was a king’. So ‘the ancient time’ is as same as ‘the former time’.”¹⁶⁷

The text is also rich in childish language and actions. For instance, “We also need a military counsellor.”¹⁶⁸ As we know, kids like to regard some events as military

¹⁶³ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Bees” (Mifeng 蜜蜂), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 360.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 365.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 385.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 365.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 370.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 374.

actions, especially boys. This is typically childish language. Furthermore, Zhang accurately grasps the mode of child's minds and actions. During a protest against the owner of the bees, some representatives go into the County Government building and do not come out in time. A kid proposes that:

“‘counting from one to one hundred, and if they still didn't get out then they must be in some trouble.’ One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve...eighty-seven, ninety-nine, one hundred. No one came out! They are in trouble. Chen Fuquan 陳福泉 says: ‘we were counting too quick. Let's recount.’ One, two, three... ninety-nine, one hundred! Recount again: One, two, three... Then recount again. It is so weird, Mr. Luo 羅, Brother Liang 良 and elder brother still don't make it. I happen to recount again. One hundred. One hundred. One hundred. One hundred.”¹⁶⁹

Through this accident, we can see out how worried and anxious these kids are. Counting is another typical childish action when they are waiting, as well as recounting. In the end, the kid is too worried, he recounts again but counts one hundred repeatedly, as though he repeats it enough, they would be brought back magically.

In addition, there are many jingles or children's rhymes in the narrative, such as “Big head ghost, drinks cold water. Knocks over water tank, and crushes his legs (Datou gui, he liangshui, bandao gang, yahuai tui 大頭鬼, 喝涼水; 扳倒缸, 軋壞腿) .”¹⁷⁰ This jingle is an impromptu children's rhyme that some kids use to tease the bee-owner's son. It is also a habit of children when they bully other kids, as they often like to compose funny rhymes.

This short story has a tragic ending: the child's father and elder brother might be executed due to the protest. However, the protagonist does not know anything about the truth, and even laughs at his teacher who mourns for his loss. Zhang deliberately describes this cruel adult world through a kid's innocent eyes (the child calls the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 382.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 363.

dagger on the top of guns of policemen as “big paper cutter”¹⁷¹), which forms a sharp contrast between what children see and the reality, and thus creates deeper irony and a stronger emotional impact.

“A Strange Place” (Qiguai de difang 奇怪的地方, 1936), I believe that can be regarded as an extended version of “After Moving House”. The basic story of “A Strange Place” is about a boy who is bullied by his young master. He fights for his rights but all the people, including his father, firmly support his opponent. He doesn’t know why they stand by young master’s side, so calls this place “a strange place”. This is another typical perspective on childhood in Zhang’s work. Xiao Minzi 小民子 lives in the master’s house with his father and uncle. One day, the young master wants to ride Xiao Minzi as a horse for fun. Xiao Minzi agrees, but he also would like to ride the young master because he considers that they are equal. Then the young master cheats him and they fight. After that, the servant Xiao Wang 小王 is beaten by the young master. Xiao Minzi thinks that they are supposed to fight each other very badly; however, he unexpectedly finds that Xiao Wang doesn’t fight back but only smiles at the young master. “Why? Xiao Wang is taller and stronger, he doesn’t need to worry about losing.”¹⁷² Zhang again uses a child’s eyes to interrogate the inequitable class society of the adult world. Xiao Minzi cannot understand why the young master, the same age as himself, is so powerful in this strange place. “Oh, What a strange place! It suffocates me! Even my dad wouldn’t help me, all adults are afraid of Tortoise Egg (Wugui dan 烏龜蛋, nickname of the young master). Why do these things happen?”¹⁷³ The absurdity of the adults confuses him so much that he cannot live there anymore and moves back to his hometown with his uncle. The child’s gaze efficiently highlights the cruelty and irrationality of the adult world, by placing the complicated emotions, filthy and sophisticated behaviours of adults in confrontation with the innocence and frankness of children. Watching evil through innocence makes the evil more apparent and thus produces the sharp irony.

However, none of the three short stories mentioned above are written for children,

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 378.

¹⁷² Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “A strange Place” (Qiguai de difang 奇怪的地方), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.8 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1991), 38.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 61, 62.

they just offer a unique perspective for criticising the adult world, which people have become desensitised to. The intended readers are still adults.

Zhang wrote three fairy tales – *Big Lin and Small Lin* (*Dalin yu xiaolin* 大林與小林, 1932), *The King of the Bald* (*Tutu dawang* 禿禿大王, 1933), and *The Empire of Golden Ducks* (*Jinya diguo* 金鴨帝國, 1942) before the foundation of the PRC. All of them are full of the ironies of class society. *The Empire of Golden Ducks* is the longest and is unfinished. The most important feature of these fairy tales is that the potential readers are children, rather than adults.

Big Lin and Small Lin is the story of two brothers who are separated from each other at the very beginning, and then step into completely different ways of life. Big Lin is adopted by a billionaire and thinks of money first, while Small Lin becomes a worker who is suppressed by capitalists. Finally, Big Lin dies of starvation surrounded by treasures and Small Lin fights against his bosses successfully. The main theme of the story is telling children that labour is glorious and laziness is shameful, which is rather adult. It is full of childish language, childlike imagination and psychological descriptions of children.

At the beginning, after their parents died, Big Lin and Small Lin become homeless and were crying on the ground. “They cried till sunrise and the sun climbs out from the east smiling. Small Lin wipes the tears and says: ‘Do you still want to cry? I would like to stop.’ ‘Well, I’m tired of crying too. Let’s go.’”¹⁷⁴ The narrator uses only a few words to depict the sudden smiling through tears of the children. After they have separated, Small Lin writes a letter to his brother Big Lin, with this on the envelope: “Send quickly, to Mr. brother. Sender Small Lin.”¹⁷⁵ No doubt, this childish letter will not be sent to Big Lin without a recipient’s address. When Mr. Bao Bao 包包 (a black fox) tries to help Big Lin become rich, he pretends to be an angel.

“Bao Bao tell Big Lin: ‘This is a pair of chicken wings, I ate ten chickens yesterday and left them.’ Then he wears this pair of chicken wings on his back.

¹⁷⁴ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Big Lin and Small Lin” (*Dalin yu xiaolin* 大林與小林), *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

Big Lin asks: 'What are you doing?' Bao Bao surprised answers: 'Don't you know? Have you ever seen fairy tales? In foreign fairy tales, the angels have wings. So I wear these chicken wings on my back, then I am a complete angel.'"¹⁷⁶

This childish dialogue looks like a common conversation between little kids in their daily life. We can find numerous examples of this kind of children's language in Zhang's fairy tales. It shows that Zhang has an intimate knowledge of children and understands them very well. With a good command of children's language, he makes children love his fairy tales.

Examples of a childlike imagination can be found nearly everywhere in Zhang's fairy tales. Two fine examples are descriptions associated with the moon in *Big Lin and Small Lin*. The two brothers are chased by a monster and they run away. "The moon has risen, curving like an eyebrow. The monster stretches himself and raises his hand, bashes the sharp corner of moon, and the skin comes off."¹⁷⁷ Then a dog and a fox catch Small Lin. He runs away again and the fox "is very surprised, cocks its ears, the hat flies to the sky, then hangs on the sharp corner of moon... The moon in the sky follows Small Lin running, and the tall hat hanging on the sharp corner of moon is swaying as it is blown by the wind."¹⁷⁸

Another example is in *The King of the Bald*. A dog called Big Lion (Da Shi 大獅) wants his brother Dong (Dong Ge'er 冬哥兒) to write a letter to trick his friend. Brother Dong tries to tell the truth, but he cannot find a pen and ink. He then figures out a solution:

"Brother Dong opens a drawer immediately, brings out a bottle of hair-restorer and a pair of chopsticks. He smears hair-restorer on the top of a chopstick. The hair-restorer can restore hairs, so many hairs grow upon the top of the chopstick and then it becomes a pen. Brother Dong uses this pen to write on the paper with hair-restorer. Hairs also grow up from the paper where he writes, which

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 106.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 72.

makes the handwriting clearer.”¹⁷⁹

Fertility of imagination is a hallmark of Zhang’s fairy tales. This fantastic childlike imagination is the main difference between his fairy tales and those short stories written through children’s perspectives, for we can barely find this childish fancy in the latter. Zhang’s fairy tales are about the child’s world, rather than the adult world. At this point, unlike Zhang, Dickens does not divide children’s worlds and adult worlds quite so clearly, which means he makes the adult world childlike, and vice-versa. Both authors do share a clear common interest when describing children.

According to George Orwell: “No one, at any rate no English writer, has written better about childhood than Dickens. [...] no novelist has shown the same power of entering into the child’s point of view.”¹⁸⁰ Dickens possesses an amazing talent for showing the exclusive, imaginative and wonderful world of children. With his brilliant mastery of children’s language and child psychology, Dickens created many vivid, substantial and concrete images of children in novels like *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and in his fairy tale “A Christmas Carol”.

As Peter Ackroyd argues: “There is something in Dickens’s infancy, something which cannot now be recovered or understood, some primal fear which left him casting about for images with which to express it and which gave him as a novelist that sensitivity to the adult world which is most often to be found in the eyes of a frightened child.”¹⁸¹ Due to the miserable sufferings of Dickens’s childhood, he likes using the viewpoint of a child who has mental wounds to see the darkness of social reality. This is a capacity both Dickens and Zhang share. They all write about children revolted by the hypocrisy of adults. The mode of the child’s gaze frequently appears in Dickens’s novel, such as the most famous ironic scene of the workhouse in *Oliver Twist*. The food supply of the workhouse is very scanty; Oliver Twist and his companions have suffered the tortures of starvation for three months. On one evening,

¹⁷⁹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “The King of the Bald” (Tutu dawang 禿禿大王), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.7 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1989), 66.

¹⁸⁰ George Orwell, “Charles Dickens”, in George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, vol.1), 423-424.

¹⁸¹ Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Minerva, 1991), 54.

“the gruel was served out [...] He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: ‘Please, Sir, I want some more.’ The master...turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.”¹⁸²

Then the workhouse authorities all agree: “That boy will be hung.”¹⁸³ It is quite ridiculous that *Oliver Twist* should be hanged only because he asked for more gruel. In a child’s mind, it is a matter of course that one asks for more food if one feels hungry. But in the adult world, people reckon that the workhouse is a charitable organization and asking for more after having eaten the dinner is an ungrateful action.

In a way, *The Pickwick Papers* is also written from a child’s perspective. Mr. Pickwick is a symbol of innocence, like an angel (Sam’s word). He encounters many strange things, such as the inexplicable proposal to Mrs Martha Bardell and the related law case. He refuses to pay any legal fare like an angry child, just because he doesn’t want the bad lawyers to succeed. He is just like an immature child, and he never grows up. “In our minds Mr Pickwick is born in middle age with independent means; his mental and physical powers are those of a middle-aged man, his experience of the world that of a newborn child.”¹⁸⁴

Much like Zhang, Dickens has a perfect grasp of the mechanisms of child psychology; he knows very well about its imaginary process and its sensitivity to certain images or impression. At the beginning of *Great Expectations*, little Pip relates images of his dead parents and five brothers to the letters on their tombstones:

“The shape of the letters on my father’s, gave me an odd idea that he was a

¹⁸² Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Macmillan And Co., 1892), 11.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸⁴ W.H.Auden, “Dingley Dell and the Fleet”, *The Dyer’s Hand*, 1962, in Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 459.

square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, '*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above*', I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine-who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle-I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence."¹⁸⁵

In *David Copperfield*, there is a similar passage. After biting Mr. Murdstone's hand, little David is sent away to a boarding school and forced to wear a placard on his back, which says "Take care of him. He bites."¹⁸⁶ He looks at an old door in the playground, on which the boys carve their names, and he imagines in what tone and with what emphasis the boys would read out the placard deriving from the appearance of their names.

"There was one boy – a certain J. Steerforth – who cut his name very deep and very often, who, I conceived, would read it in a rather strong voice, and afterwards pull my hair. There was another boy, one Tommy Traddles, who I dreaded would make game of it and pretend to be dreadfully frightened of me. There was a third, George Dimple, who I fancied would sing it."¹⁸⁷

As a child, these are exactly the images that those particular names would bring about. The reason, might be the sound-associations of the words (Dimple-temple). This subtle association testifies that Dickens has the capacity to dig into children's minds, and to see the world with children's unprotected vision.

Actually, Dickens's exaggerated style of description and the static condition of his characters more or less derive from his children's perspectives. Since when one watches the world from a child's viewpoint, he has to look up to observe those tall

¹⁸⁵ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965), 35.

¹⁸⁶ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992), 74.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 75,76.

things, so they tend to show themselves to be bigger than they really are. There is one peculiar quality of Dickens that is hard to imitate – the creativity of an exuberant, integrated world. Although this world has its limitations, readers just like it, for it is so like the imaginary world we knew when we were kids. In Dickens's fancy world, characters are as same as the adults we saw in our childhood. From a children's impression, they are larger than they supposed to be, and they never change, grow old or die. They are more like mythological figures, living in the mythical world. Zhang's *The Empire of Golden Ducks* is the most similar text (it even has a larger format) to Dickens's mythical world; unfortunately, it remains unfinished.

The children's perspective is an important trait of both Dickens's and Zhang's works. It's hard to say that it is just a coincidence. I believe that Zhang might learnt this mode from Dickens to some extent. This inheritance is not only because of their similar growth environment, individual temperament and life experience, but also their creative spiritual awareness. Even if Zhang imitated children's perspectives from Dickens, he cannot imitate the fertility of imagination, and he definitely could not write those popular fairy tales without a vivid imagination. Also, in order to know children's minds, Zhang kept touch with children in the PRC until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁸⁸ In the history of Republican Chinese literature, Zhang tops the list regarding his sustained contribution to children's literature.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Shen Chengkuan 沈成寬 et al. eds. *Research Materials on Zhang Tianyi (Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao 張天翼研究資料)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 36-42.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 461.

Section VI: Language

C.T. Hsia was interviewed in 2011 in New York about his contributions to the history of Chinese literature.

“Who do you think has also been underestimated or overlooked among modern Chinese writers in New Literature?’ the journalist asked.

‘My *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* emphasises four authors: Zhang Ailing 張愛玲, Shen Congwen 沈從文, Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 and Zhang Tianyi 張天翼. People focus their attention on the first three authors, however, they ignore Zhang Tianyi, which is a shame. Even Lu Xun envied Zhang as he is better than Lu on irony.... It might be Zhang’s identity (a Left-Wing writer) which leads to him being overlooked by the public at present. He was the best short-story writer in his time, especially his depictions of the dark psychologies of people and comedy, even though he was a Left-Wing writer.’ C.T. Hsia answered.”¹⁹⁰

The research on Zhang Tianyi, as well as his status in the Republican Chinese literary field, is far less prominent than the other three authors that C.T. Hsia recommended. In addition to the sheer size of Zhang’s oeuvre, one main reason, I posit, is Zhang’s language.

The most significant feature of his language is its simplicity and fluidity; his language is quite easy to understand. In the 1920s and 1930s, after the commencement of New Culture Movement, many Chinese writers faced a general question: how to expand their literary influence into the area of less educated people? At that time, the average education level of Chinese people was rather low, compared with the present. Many students and educated middle-class citizens read new literature; however, the amount of non-intellectual readers was considerable. One of the main aims of the May Fourth Movement was employing vernacular Chinese to awaken Chinese people. Later, many Chinese writers (particularly the Left-Wing writers who were encouraged to focus on rural subjects) tried to use natural, clear and plain

¹⁹⁰ Shi Jianfeng 石劍峰, “A Personal Interview with C.T. Hsia” (Xia Zhiqing zhuanfang 夏志清專訪), in *Dongfang zaobao* 東方早報, Nov. 8th, 2011.

language to attract the attention of poorly educated and children readers. Of these writers, Zhang Tianyi might be the best.

For most Republican Chinese writers, a major difficulty was that they had little contact with real workers and peasants. The language they used was that of intellectuals of the time, which was normally a kind of combination of long vernacular sentences with Europeanised grammar, a strange bookish language that workers or peasants would find impossible to use in their daily life. Many lower-class characters in fiction are unrealistic, for they speak the language of intellectuals, which means the well-educated authors tried to put their dialogue in the mouths of workers and peasants. As one of the Left-Wing writers, Zhang was fully aware of this serious problem. He himself also used elegant language in his early literary career (1922 to 1928), such as “Black Vibration” (Hei de chandong 黑的顫動, 1926) and “Towards a New Road” (Zouxiang xinde lu 走向新的路, 1927), then he changed his linguistic style from ornate to plain. In an autobiographical article, Zhang mentions this transformation in a humorous manner:

“...At the second time, I showed some stuff that I had written to the friend. He suddenly began to shake and heaved lots of vomit. I asked if it was stomach disease and whether he wanted to call a doctor. He shook his head and gasped, said painfully:

‘It’s not a stomach disease. It happens whenever I read such affected and sour vernacular.’

That was a big shock to me. I told him haltingly that I made it a little elegant and beautiful deliberately. I couldn’t write too crudely since I cared about artistic value.

My friend, however, actually had a physical pain. [...] I paid attention to conversations and learned that not everyone spoke the beautiful and grammatically proper language of essays. Besides, they often used humorous slang. I must use true speech to let people understand, since I want to describe true events

in the real world [...] I learned that different people have different talking styles. [...] Not all people in the world would use beautiful, elegant and sour speech, which is not one in a hundred.”¹⁹¹

Zhang imitated the actual speech patterns of all classes of Chinese society, and made an effort to get daily speech onto the printed page. In this aspect, he achieved great success. According to many critics, such as Gu Zhongyi 顧仲彝, who was Zhang’s contemporary: “Zhang Tianyi’s language is worth praising as ‘natural’... His dialogue contains various dialects...Every line of speech fits the character who speaks”.¹⁹² Gu enumerated several dialogues from different types of characters in Zhang’s fiction including peasants, rural old women, gentlemen, children, scholars, and rogues. He considered the lively dialogue to be Zhang’s principal accomplishments. Hu Feng, another of Zhang’s contemporaries, argued that:

“What Zhang uses is ‘new language’ and ‘common speech’. The vocabulary he chooses is simple and oral....which is very effective – he draws readers’ attention, this is one of his features. Zhang wants to convey life’s reality to readers. This aim forces Zhang to select the most accurate words in oral language. Hence, Zhang’s language is a kind of new language (in Republican Chinese literature). But Zhang’s method of description is sometimes too simple; the workers and soldiers he describes would always talk dirty. He needs to select more carefully...”¹⁹³

In addition, C.T. Hsia suggests that:

“He does away with ornate language, discards the lengthy paragraphic structure, renders the speech habits of every social class with comic or dramatic precision. No other modern Chinese writer has surpassed him in the accuracy and range of his dialectal representation.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Stories of Writing” (Chuangzuo de gushi 創作的故事), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 136, 137.

¹⁹² Gu Zhongyi 顧仲彝, “Zhang Tianyi’s short stories” (Zhang Tianyi de duanpian xiaoshuo 張天翼的短篇小說), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 267.

¹⁹³ Hu Feng 胡風, “On Zhang Tianyi” (Zhang Tianyi lun 張天翼論), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 293.

¹⁹⁴ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 212.

Shu-Ying Tsau makes a similar point in her doctoral thesis:

“He was considered unsurpassed among his contemporaries in the accurate use of the colloquial and of dialects. The range of language styles available to him gives his writings a notable richness of texture. Zhang not only made use of existing forms of expression, but also was quite inventive in his language.”¹⁹⁵

According to these comments, it is clear that the plain style of Zhang’s language is rare in contemporary fiction. Although Zhang’s “natural language” might also be a kind of “invented language”, but at least his language is closer to the true speech that modern Chinese people spoke in daily life. The May Fourth fiction had a legacy from traditional literature, reinforced by its borrowing from Western literature, making the language both elegant and exotic. Hence, Zhang’s language style was recognised as fresh by his contemporary authors and critics. This was a striking advantage for an author at that time. After the Cultural Revolution, when the national education level increases, however, Zhang’s language becomes coarse and crude to new readers. Dialogue in Zhang’s fiction tends to be represented in a vulgar style since he describes a good deal of workers, soldiers and peasants. Thus, to the new generation, the literariness of Zhang’s works is lower than that of Zhang Ailing, Shen Congwen and Qian Zhongshu. That is perhaps why Zhang Tianyi studies were never as popular as the others.

1. Zhang Tianyi’s Language

Generally, the features of Zhang Tianyi’s language can be divided into four categories:

(1) Common speech

One of the most distinctive features of Zhang’s language is his preference for using common speech, rather than written language. Zhang captures actual speech habits and patterns; some of them are unfamiliar to the readers today. The number of examples in the usage of common speech is very large: “Lao zong” 老總 (literally

¹⁹⁵ Shu-Ying Tsau, “Zhang Tianyi’s Fiction: The Beginning of Proletarian Literature in China”, University of Toronto, 1976, 157.

“old general”), for instance, is a word that citizens normally call soldiers in their presence, and “bing youzi” 兵油子 (pejorative) in their absence. Soldiers call their officers as “xiao jiuzi” 小舅子 (literally “brother in law”, which shows contempt, equal to “young fellow”), rather than the formal term “Zhangguan” 長官. In all fiction about war, bullet is replaced by “hei zaozi” 黑棗子 (black jujube); “huabian” 花邊 means foreign money in rural area; “laobiao” 老表 means relative; “fen tuanzi” 粉團子 means factory manager; “diaoyang” 吊羊 means kidnap; “muku yun” 暮苦運 means bad luck; “lujing” 路徑 means solution; “chatang wu” 茶堂屋 means a combination of kitchen and parlour, and usury is not named with the standard term “gao lidai” 高利貸, but with a common used word by peasants called “yinzi qian” 印子錢 (fingerprint money), since a peasant signed a contract with a moneylender with his fingerprint.

Some of Zhang’s characters tend to speak common sayings. Examples of this are innumerable and include “jinzhuzhechi, jinmozhehei” 近朱者赤, 近墨者黑 (literally, those near scarlet are red, those near ink are black. It means keep good men company and you shall be of their number); “jia chou buke waiyang” 家醜不可外揚 (literally, domestic shame should not be made public. It means there is a skeleton in the cupboard); “yicun guangyin yicun jin” 一寸光陰一寸金 (literally, an inch of time is worth an inch of gold, means time is money); “jinzhao youjiu jinzhao zui” 今朝有酒今朝醉 (literally, today we have wine so today we get drunk. It means live for today); “gouzui tubuchu xiangya” 狗嘴吐不出象牙 (literally, no ivory will come of a dog’s mouth. It equals a cracked bell can never sound well); “tianxia wuya yiban hei” 天下烏鴉一般黑 (literally, all crows under the sun are black. It means evil people are the same kind of evil all over the world), and “qiaofu nanwei wumi zhichui” 巧婦難為無米之炊 (literally, even a clever housewife cannot cook a meal without rice. It means you cannot make something out of nothing), etc. If necessary, dirty words could be used, normally by peasants, workers, soldiers and other minimally educated people in Zhang’s fiction. Examples include “Gui le bao dui” 歸了包堆, “cao ta wowo” 操他窩窩, “ma gao cao” 媽糕操, “ma le bazi” 媽了巴子, etc. All of them equal “tama de” 他媽的

(fuck you) in Mandarin.¹⁹⁶ In modern Chinese literature, this is rare. I suspect that these vulgarisms are part of why Zhang scholarship has not received the attention that I believe it merits.

This shows that Zhang Tianyi paid attention to common slang and idiom used at the time. With the widespread use of common speech and common sayings, Zhang gives common readers easy access to his fiction. His language is close enough to the common people and allows them to understand. To maximize this effect, Zhang also uses dialect.

(2) Dialect

As C.T. Hsia notes, Zhang Tianyi's dialectal representation is unparalleled among Republican Chinese writers. The following examples are only a selection. Shanghainese in "The Monk Brigade Leader" (Heshang daduizhang 和尚大隊長), "The Night of Honey" (Miwei de ye 蜜味的夜), *The Cogwheel* (Chilun 齒輪) and *The Strange Knight of Shanghai* (Yangjing bang qixia 洋涇浜奇俠): "nong" 儂 for "ni" 你 (you), "wu" 勿 for "bu" 不 (no), "a la" 阿拉 for "wo men" 我們 (we), "xiaode" 曉得 for "zhidao" 知道 (know), "baixiang" 白相 for "wan" 玩 (play), "chilao" 赤佬 for "guizi" 鬼子 (a term of abuse for foreign invaders), "qusi" 屈死 for greenhorn. Northeastern dialect in "The Last Train" (Zuihou lieche 最後列車): "bushan" 不善 for pretty terrible, "niangmen" 娘們 for women, "lao geda" 老疙瘩 for "xiaodi" 小弟 (younger brother) or "xiao erzi" 小兒子 (the youngest son), "nainai xiong" 奶奶雄 for damn. Sichuan dialect in "The Failure of Lord Snake" (She taiye de shibai 蛇太爺的失敗): "meidei" 沒得 for "meiyou" 沒有 (do not have). Nanjing dialect in *The Cogwheel*: "fen" 芬 for "feng" 風(wind), "chengbang" 懲鎊 for "chengfa" 懲罰 (punish). Southern dialect in "A Female Buddhist Devotee" (Shan nüren, 善女人): "muma" 姆媽 for mother, "niangshage" 娘殺格 as curse words. Hunan dialect in "Wan ren Yue" 萬仞約 and *The Strange Knight of Shanghai*: "mapi" 麻皮 for cunt, "shikuang gutou" 屍框骨頭 and "niang mai changzi" 娘賣腸子 for goddamn, "bajingke" 疤頸殼 for cheater,

¹⁹⁶ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1.2.3.4.5.6 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985-1988), 104.

“yanchuan”鹽船 for “yangchuan”洋船 (foreign ship), “yanzijian”鹽子奸 for “yangzijiang”揚子江(Yangtze), “douzi”斗子 for “duzi”肚子 (belly).¹⁹⁷

(3) Foreign Language Vocabulary

There was a fashion to combine foreign letters, words and transliteration into a Chinese text directly during the May Fourth movement. This phenomenon frequently appeared in literature, the press and even government documents. Such as the city of “S”, the town of “K”, the port of “S”, Miss “F”, and Mr. “T” are normally used in Republican Chinese fiction. Also, dialogue in an odd style with the insertion of foreign words and transliteration into Chinese sentences is very commonly spoken by Europeanised intellectuals, partly of necessity but also partly due to fashion.

Zhang Tianyi puts the daily speech of intellectuals into his fiction to mock the affected Chinese elite. Examples are innumerable and the foreign words are not only English but also include French, Japanese and Sanskrit. The words that are foreign language vocabulary in the original text have been underlined: “He even said that I tried hard to find Decadence. Try hard, it is so funny to say trying hard to find Decadence.”¹⁹⁸; “I am a feeble-minded person, just seek ease and comfort, I am a Bon vivant”¹⁹⁹; “They say the big mouth is popular among movie stars in haoliwo (耗痢窩, a transliteration for Hollywood) at present.”²⁰⁰; “Great, you are better than Wenxi (瘟西, a bantering transliteration for the famous artist Leonardo da Vinci).”²⁰¹; “She is young and beautiful. That is all.”²⁰²; “Well, why so heisideli (黑死得痢, a transliteration for hysteria). Calm down, calm down.”²⁰³; “Her parents could not afford to raise her. She was sent to the Buddhist convent as a youpoyi (優婆夷, a transliteration for Sanskrit, which means a haired nun) when she was nine years old.”²⁰⁴; “He put danbagu (淡巴姑, a transliteration for tobacco) in his pipe.”²⁰⁵; “Fuck

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “From Emptiness to Fullness” (Cong kongxu dao chongshi 從空虛到充實), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 36.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 61.

²⁰⁰ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “A Loose Love Story” (Xisong de lianai gushi 稀鬆的戀愛故事), Ibid., 164.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 169.

²⁰² Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “A man in search of stimulation” (Zhaoxun ciji de ren 找尋刺激的人), Ibid., 200.

²⁰³ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Moving on” (Yihang 移行), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.2 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 160.

²⁰⁴ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “A female Buddhist devotee” (Shan nüren 善女人), Ibid., 379.

his wojishang (渥雞傷, a trans-literation for Japanese “おじいさん”, which means grandfather)²⁰⁶, “Dagoutou”²⁰⁷ (大狗頭, a transliteration for Doctor), “Misesi”²⁰⁸ (覓色死, a transliteration for Mrs.) and “Mi si tuo”²⁰⁹ (覓死脫, a transliteration for Mr.), etc. A great number of foreign names and nouns that reflect foreign cultures, products, lifestyle and entertainment appear in Zhang’s fiction directly: Baudelaire, Taras Bulba, Beardsley, Wilde, D’Annunzio, Verhaeren, Garbo, Clara Bow, Carmen, chocolate, ice cream, picnic, vanishing cream, dance hall, king, her Majesty, salon, peppermint, Freudism, mysticism, modernist, saxophone, montage, etc. Zhang makes Republican Chinese intellectuals seem ridiculous through the rigid juxtaposition of foreign words and Chinese sentences. Most of them are obviously for showing off. These foreign words appear only in the dialogue of intellectuals or in the narrator’s text for satirising intellectuals. Thus, Zhang indicates his critical attitude toward the fashion of his time.

(4) Onomatopoeia

The rich use of onomatopoeia gives Zhang’s fiction a vivid effect of oral narration, and makes dialogue of his characters closer to the actual daily speech of people. For instance, “Vou” represents a dog barking; “dadadi” (達達帝) and “gougoucha” (夠夠叱) for music rhythm; “sisisisi” (嚙) suggests an Opium pipe; the sound of a falling basin and bowl is “paila” (拍喇) or “huala” (嘩啦); crying is “gugugu” (咕); the sound of creaking of the door is given as “ya’an” (呀俺); footstep sounds “honglong” (訇隆); the sound of clock is “dang dang”; “paipaipai” (拍), “gagagaga” (嘎) and “gegegegege” (格) indicate gunfire. Such one-syllable phrases repeated many times over conveys a sense of continual sound and a feeling of immediacy and tension. Zhang often uses onomatopoeia to indicate actual sound, and this method gives his readers an intimate feeling.

²⁰⁵ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Chase” (Zhui 追), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.3 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 391.

²⁰⁶ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Hero of Our Time” (Shidai de yingxiong 時代的英雄), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.4 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 433.

²⁰⁷ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, *The Cogwheel* (Chilun 齒輪), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.5 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1987), 186.

²⁰⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, *The strange knight of Shanghai* (Yangjing bang qixia 洋涇浜奇俠), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.6 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1988), 37.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 127.

Above all, there is a huge difference between the oral language of intellectuals and lower-class characters in Zhang's fiction. That is, the sentences of the latter are much shorter, as they are less adorned and have simpler sentence structures. Furthermore, the lower-class characters represent a more authentically Chinese style of language since they had less exposure to Western cultures and languages. Most of the dialogue of soldiers, peasants and workers share this kind of simplicity as they share the same social background. Regarding oral language in writing, Zhang vividly restores the actual speech of different classes of society to the largest extent. This restoration is one of his greatest contributions to Republican Chinese literature.

2. Charles Dickens's Language

In respect to emphasising oral language in writing, Zhang Tianyi and Dickens meet on common ground again. Dickens was extremely fond of using spoken language in his fiction. As G.L.Brook proposes that:

“Dickens realized that spoken language has a wider range of ways of expressing meaning and emotion than written language, and he makes an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the written language by giving the reader fairly frequent descriptions of the way in which character speak.”²¹⁰

Dickens made a serious attempt to achieve verisimilitude in making the language of his characters appropriate to their personality, as well as social background. Dialect was the most important device that Dickens employed in his language. The dialects he used can be classified as three categories:

(1) Class Dialects

The most interesting feature of the language used by the characters of Dickens is the wide variety of class dialects. Specifically, these class dialects are mainly the speech of the upper classes and those of poor people living in London.

²¹⁰ G.L.Brook, *The Language of Dickens* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1970), 39.

Dickens's references to upper-class speech are generally uncomplimentary. The upper-class characters normally speak their exclusive (mostly old-fashioned) vocabulary and idiom and use archaic expressions of politeness. The formerly fashionable greeting, for instance, "Your servant", occurs frequently in the mouths of unfashionable characters of novels of Dickens. When John Browdie and Nicholas Nickleby are introduced to each other, Browdie says "Servant, sir" and Nicholas replies "Yours to command, sir"²¹¹ The greetings are repeated when they meet again after a quarrel: "'Servant, young gentleman,' said John. 'Yours,' said Nicholas."²¹² The same greetings also occur in *David Copperfield* when Mr. Micawber says "Your servant" to Uriah Heep's mother.²¹³

There are other examples belonging to an upper-class dialect, such as when Sir John Chester speaks to Haredale, providing a translation of the word "hipped": "You will be hipped, Haredale; you will be miserable, melancholy, utterly wretched."²¹⁴ Mr. Chester uses very similar words here to emphasise his advice. Moreover, there is a speech of "the simpering fellow with the weak legs" in *David Copperfield*:

"'Oh, you know, deuce take it,' said this gentleman, looking round the board with an imbecile smile, 'we can't forego Blood, you know. We must have Blood, you know. Some young fellows, you know, may be a little behind their station, perhaps, in point of education and behavior, and may go a little wrong, you know, and get themselves and other people into a variety of fixes – and all that – but deuce take it, it's delightful to reflect that they've got Blood in 'em. Myself, I'd rather at any time be knocked down by a man who had got Blood in him, than I'd be picked up by a man who hadn't!'"²¹⁵

The chief characteristics of this kind of speech are its repetitiveness and the speaker's fondness for meaningless expletives.

²¹¹ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978), 172.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 224.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 246.

²¹⁴ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1890), 169.

²¹⁵ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1992), 354.

The low-life characters in Dickens's fiction, obviously, use another kind of speech, and the substandard speech plays a prominent part in his texts. Dickens was very fond of using the lower class speech of his time. Substandard speech in its most extreme form is represented by the language of the underworld, widely known as cant, which has its origin in a desire for keeping secrets. A typical specimen comes from Chapter 31 of *Oliver Twist*. The two Bow Street Runners Blathers and Duff, who are sent to investigate the burglary at Mrs. Maylie's, speak a distinctive dialect, with a plentiful mixture of cant. Cant is used at the very beginning of this chapter when Blathers says that Duff is "in the gig, a-minding the prad".²¹⁶ "Prad", from Dutch "paard", is a cant word for a horse, commonly used in the nineteenth century. Later Duff uses "crack" as a term for a burglary and Blathers speaks of "blunt" in the sense "money". Both words are common in nineteenth-century thieves' slang.²¹⁷

(2) Occupational Dialects

Occupational dialect, especially those of the learned professions, are well represented in Dickens's fiction. Dickens took a delight in collecting the technical vocabulary of various occupations such as attorneys, priests and naval officers. Legal language, for example, is inevitably common in *Bleak House*. Even John Jarndyce, who hates lawyers, finds himself using legal language in his conversation with Guppy: "'Thank you, Mr. Guppy,' returned my guardian. 'I am quite willing-I believe I use a legal phrase-to admit the certificate.'"²¹⁸ Dickens describes various kinds of forensic eloquence in this fiction:

"The very learned gentleman who has cooled the natural heat of his gingery complexion in pools and fountains of law, until he has become great in knotty arguments for term-time, when he poses the drowsy Bench with legal 'chaff', inexplicable to the uninitiated and to most of the initiated too, is roaming, with a characteristic delight in aridity and dust, about Constantinople."²¹⁹

The unnecessary use of abbreviations in legal documents is satirised in the letter

²¹⁶ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 210.

²¹⁷ G.L.Brook, *The Language of Dickens* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1970), 96.

²¹⁸ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Aylesbury: Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd, 1930), vol.2, 505.

²¹⁹ Ibid.vol.1, 314.

which Kenge and Garboy send to Esther Summerson. This letter satirises the inhumanity of the lawyers who refer to Esther as though she were an inanimate object:

“Old Square, Lincoln’s Inn.

Madam,

Jarndyce and Jarndyce

Our clt Mr. Jarndyce being abt to rece into his house, under an Order of the Ct of Chy, a Ward of the Ct in this cause, for whom he wishes to secure an elgble compn, directs us to inform you that he will be glad of your serces in the afsd capacity.

We have arrngd for your being forded, carriage free, p^r eight o’clock coach from Reading, on Monday morning next, to White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, London, where one of our clks will be in waiting to convey you to our offe as above.

We are, Madam, Your obed^t Serv^{ts},

Kenge and Carboy.

Miss Esther Summerson. ”²²⁰

Another novel that is full of legal language is *Pickwick Papers*. Legal terms are freely used by Perker, Dodson and Fogg and their clerks. For instance, Perker tries to impress his clients by using tags of legal Latin, such as “amicus curiae” and “ad captandum”,²²¹ and for the same reason, he is fond of quoting legal precedents, such as “the well-known case in Barnwell.”²²²

The distinctive language of members of religious sects has always been a favourite object for satire. The chief characteristic of this kind of language is the frequent use of archaisms and of not very appropriate quotations from the Bible. Mr. Chadband speaks of “corn, and wine, and oil-or, what is much the same thing, money-for the

²²⁰ Ibid., 32.

²²¹ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1999), 136.

²²² Ibid.

keeping thereof?”²²³ Lord George Gordon says that he must not be a sluggard “when the vineyard is menaced with destruction, and may be trodden down by Papist feet”²²⁴, and Stiggins uses “A man of wrath!”²²⁵ as a term of abuse. Great use is made of the word “brother”: Mr. Honeythunder concludes a letter “Your affectionate brother”,²²⁶ and at the Brick Lane Temperance meeting Mr. Humm reinforces the term by the use of archaic language: “‘He may approach, I think,’ said Mr Humm, looking round him, with a fat smile. ‘Brother Tadger, let him come forth and greet us.’”²²⁷

(3) Regional Dialects

Dickens spent much more of his life in London than in any country district, and he took a keen interest in the variations of dialect. According to G.L. Brook in *The Language of Dickens*,

“There are three English regions whose dialects are represented in some detail in the novels of Dickens: East Anglia in *David Copperfield*, Yorkshire in *Nicholas Nickleby* and Lancashire in *Hard Times*...the dialects of the United States used in *American Notes* and in the American chapters of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.”²²⁸

Local dialects also occur many times in the other novels. In *Bleak House*, for instance, the Scottish doctor uses expressions like “Ey! Bless the hearts o’ ye”, “Air you in the maydickle prayfession yourself, sir?” and “Then I’ll just tak’ my depairture”.²²⁹

The Yarmouth chapters of *David Copperfield* are full of East Anglian dialect. Mr. Peggotty is the main dialect speaker, and his nephew Ham, Mrs. Gummidge and Barkis all make a contri-bution. The dialect occurs in Chapters 3, 5, 7, 30, 32, 40, 46, 51 and 63. “Sometimes they are printed with an initial capital to call attention to their dialectal status. Some of these words are common standard English words used in

²²³ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Aylesbury: Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd, 1930), vol.2, 352.

²²⁴ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1890), 234.

²²⁵ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1999), 355.

²²⁶ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood and Other Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1998), 45.

²²⁷ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1999), 443.

²²⁸ G.L.Brook, *The Language of Dickens* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1970), 117.

²²⁹ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Aylesbury: Hazell Watson and Viney Ltd, 1930), vol.1, 168.

dialects with a difference of form, function, or meaning. Others are words that do not occur in standard English.”²³⁰ Examples are extensive:

“afeerd” for “afraid”,

“afore” for “before”,

[...]

“gorm” for “damn”.

And many other examples.²³¹

The speech of the Yorkshireman John Browdie in *Nicholas Nickleby* might be one of the most lasting attempts to describe a regional dialect in Dickens’s novel. Most of the examples from his speech are in chapters 6, 9, 13, 39, 42, 45 and 64.

As G.L. Brook summarises:

“Several words are used which are especially common in Northern dialects, such as *lass*, *gang* for ‘go’, *nowt* ‘nothing’, *reckon* ‘think’, *gin* ‘if’...”²³²

In *Hard Times*, Stephen Blackpool and Rachael speak with a distinct Lancashire dialect. The dialectal expressions are presented in Book I, Chapters 10, 11 and 13, Book II, chapters 4, 5 and 6, and Book III, chapters 4 and 6.

The dialectal words in *Hard Times* are strongly marked and some of them, like “sin”, “mun” and “haply” occur many times. The following examples are the chief north-country words that appear in the novel:

“afore” for “before”,

“ahind” and “ahint” for “behind”,

[...]

“mun” for “must”,

“na” for “not”,

²³⁰ G.L.Brook, *The Language of Dickens* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1970), 118.

²³¹ Ibid., 118-122.

²³² Ibid., 122-124.

“nowt” for “nothing”,
“sin” for “since”.²³³

Overall, one of the problems that every novelist must face is that they need to use written language to represent the much wider ranges of expression that are available to a speaker. Some novelists simply give up any attempt to portray spoken language realistically, and the result is that their characters talk as if they were reading from a book.²³⁴ The spoken word is generally much less grammatically correct than most speakers imagine, or perhaps it would be better to say that speech has a grammar of its own. Both Dickens and Zhang Tianyi realised the difficulty of representing in writing the wide range of effects that can be achieved in speech. They made a huge effort to achieve a realistic representation of spoken language in their fiction. Hence, in many cases, they recorded the sort of thing that people actually say in real life. In this respect, they share the same standpoint.

²³³ Ibid., 125.

²³⁴ Ibid., 138.

Chapter III: Discrepancies between Zhang Tianyi and Dickens

Generally speaking, there were mainly two modes by which foreign authors exerted their influence on Republican Chinese authors: textual and non-textual transmissions. Textual transmission refers to the text itself, which means structures, topics, writing skills, language, etc. Non-textual transmission refers to an author's creative individuality (such as style and artistic inclination) and personal emotions behind the artwork. In this respect, Dickens and Zhang do share some thoughts, for instance, their humanitarian feelings.

If we imagine Dickens as an entertainer whose works contain a hint of anger, then Zhang Tianyi must be an indignant fighter, always fighting against inequality and social darkness. Indeed, there are many superficial similarities between Zhang Tianyi's and Dickens's literary works, as well as their creative individuality such as humour and humanitarian feelings. Nevertheless, by comparison, it can be found that they have obvious discrepancies, which can be mainly categorised into four points: the degree of their criticism about the social system; their attitude towards social revolution; their opinions on artistry, and their attitude towards life. This chapter aims to explore the discrepancies between their inner world and the projections in their works, and tries to give the reasons behind them.

Section I: Criticism of the Social System

The most apparent discrepancy between Zhang and Dickens is that they regard their social systems in different ways. What Zhang expects is rebuilding whilst Dickens prefers reform. In Zhang's works, he satirises almost every class of Chinese society in the 1930s (as shown in section II of Chapter II); finally all his satire points to the social institution that forms those abnormal characters. Regarding the content, as I will detailed in the beginning of Chapter IV, there are five categories, each of them ultimately pointing to the social evils of Republican China. Zhang finds that these social ills are incurable.

In the first category, take "Mr. Jing Ye" (Jing Ye xiansheng 荊野先生, 1929) as an example. It narrates from a third-person perspective. This is a typical story that describes the intel-lectuals tortured by the KMT during the reign of white terror, both in mental and physical ways. Mr. Jing Ye is a straying and decadent intellectual, living in pain and confusion, who always wants to "grasp the center of the era".²³⁵ He is, as he said, "committing chronic suicide".²³⁶ In a conversation in his dream, Jing Ye considers that his pain is

"a common pain in his generation, indeed. However, this kind of pain will not last. One day, after the change of the era, the pain will finally end....I mean changing social institutions.' 'The change of social institutions? So you must be a revolutionary. Wow! What a surprise!' Jing Ye feels a little shamed, revolutionary leaves an awful and super-ficial impression on him. He said 'Revolution is horrible. I am not a revolutionary.' 'So why do you...' 'I am expecting something. When it comes, my true life will begin. My current terrible life is just a prologue. "²³⁷

However, Jing Ye does not know what he is expecting. Soon the change comes, the police inspect his flat and take him to the prison early one morning. In prison, he

²³⁵ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "From Emptiness to Fullness" (Cong kongxu dao chongshi 從空虛到充實), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 44.

²³⁶ Ibid., 40.

²³⁷ Ibid., 41.

hears one of his friends Ge Ping 戈平 being cruelly tortured and finally executed. After a few days, Jing Ye is released, but he suffers serious mental trauma due to this horrible experience. He then finally realises that this is what he expects, the change of life. He cherishes this opportunity of rebirth and decides to leave. Half a year later, there are several conflicting pieces of information about the present situation of Jing Ye. Some are good, some bad, but all of them are possible.

Basically, Ge Ping and Jing Ye represent the two ways that the KMT tortures intellectuals, physically and mentally. Ge Ping is suspected of being a Communist, so he is tormented and killed by police. Nevertheless, the police put Jing Ye in jail for no reason. Ge Ping dies for his indomitable revolutionary spirit (he is probably a Communist although the narrator does not make it clear), and his death leads Jing Ye to a new future (be it good or bad). Ge Ping is described as a hero; everyone admires him, including Jing Ye and his friends and even the prison guard. After his death, Ge Ping is praised by Jing Ye's prison guard: "the expression of the guard suddenly turning from amused to serious. 'Ge Ping is a hero.'"²³⁸ By contrast, Jing Ye is a typical vacillating intellectual who shows his cowardice when he encounters revolution. His life is a so-called grey life; he wants to change his path but does not know how. He hopes to end his pain with the changing of the era, specifically, the change of social institutions. Nevertheless, when it naturally relates to the revolution, Jing Ye feels uncomfortable and ashamed to be called a revolutionary.

Jing Ye supports reforming the social system, rather than changing it radically. This is very similar to Dickens's thought. So Jing Ye might be considered a reformist, much like Dickens, and one could suppose that Zhang's attitude towards Jing Ye is equal to his attitude towards Dickens. Undoubtedly, from Zhang's perspective, Jing Ye is a coward who wanders in a grey life, yearning for change but fearing it simultaneously. The multiple and conflicting endings of Jing Ye symbolise the different choices made by this group of people: continue to live in a more decadent grey life, fight for revolution, or resign to joining the petty bourgeoisie. In this story, Zhang praises Ge Ping's strong will and indomitable spirit, criticises Jing Ye's cowardice and weakness, and thus makes his attitude towards criticism of the Republican Chinese social

²³⁸ Ibid., 59.

system very clear.

Above all, in Zhang's stories, his satire finally points to the social system, which oppresses and tortures people. In his satirical lampoons, Zhang criticised the ugly facts of life in the 1930s. Truly, Zhang is relentless and resolute in his desire to reveal the weaknesses of the "national character" of Republican China and to criticise the context that produces these weaknesses – the social system.

According to Yang Yi, Zhang Tianyi "was the first Left-Wing writer who restored the crucial literary topic on the national character. It is certain that Zhang inherited the spirit of criticism about the "national character" (guomin xing 國民性) from Lu Xun. "

²³⁹ Regarding criticism of the "national character" and social system, Zhang has a radical attitude. Zhang Daming 張大明 argues: "Among Left-Wing writers, Zhang Tianyi's accomplishment of criticism of Republican Chinese society and culture was comparable with Lu Xun."²⁴⁰ In fact, most progressive Republican Chinese writers criticised the social system, which was due to the reality of the day. Realism played a crucial role in Republican Chinese literature. Chinese intellectuals assumed that successfully transplanted realism would encourage the audiences to actively involve themselves in the important social and political issues of the day. As Leo Ou-fan Lee supposes:

"what distinguishes this modern phase of Chinese literature, is its 'obsessive concern with China as a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease and therefore unable to strengthen itself or change its set ways of inhumanity.' This 'patriotic passion', which enkindles all the major writers of the period... It is this obsession that dictates, in turn, a general preoccupation with content, rather than form, and a preponderance of 'realism'."²⁴¹

According to Lee, a typical May Fourth writer has a combination of three features:

²³⁹ Yang Yi 楊義, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* vol.2 (*Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo shi* 中國現代小說史) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1986), 363.

²⁴⁰ Zhang Daming 張大明, "Zhang Tianyi and literary circle of Left-Wing" (Zhang Tianyi he zuoyi wentan 張天翼和左翼文壇), in Wu, Huang and Shen, eds. *Zhang Tianyi lun* (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1987), 104.

²⁴¹ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "Literary Trends I: The Quest for Modernity, 1895-1927" in John K. Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol.12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 451.

roman-ticism in temperament, realism in literary principle and humanitarianism in basic philo-sophy.²⁴² This pattern was inherited by many post-May Fourth writers as well, perhaps alongside a stronger political inclination. In this respect, Zhang is a typical post-May Fourth writer whose main works were published through the 1930s.

However, this appeal to realism is more like pragmatism, which is far from the western notions of realism.

“Beginning with Ch'en Tu-hsiu, the concept of 'realism' contained a strong dose of this socio – political obsession....The 'realistic' literature produced in the early 1920s was a far cry from Balzac or Flaubert; it yielded not so much an objective representation of reality as 'reality refracted through a very subjective consciousness.’”²⁴³

This means that what the May Fourth writers pursued was revolutionary realism, rather than verisimilitude. Marston Anderson argues:

“At least in the early years of the New Literature movement, Chinese writers rarely discussed problems of verisimilitude – how the text works to establish an equivalency between itself and the extra literary world – and little critical attention was given to the technical problems of fictional representation, a preoccupation of such Western realists as Flaubert and James.”²⁴⁴

Realism was embraced by advanced Chinese intellectuals, as it seemed to meet Republican Chinese needs in the urgent context of appealing for cultural transformation. However, realism adapted itself to fit the Republican Chinese environment.

“Traditional Chinese literary theory was dominated by a notion of literature as the spontaneous expression of the author's emotional life; even when a place for observation was found in literary composition, it was understood as only a stage

²⁴² Ibid., 493.

²⁴³ Ibid., 493, 494.

²⁴⁴ Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (California: University of California Press, 1990), 37.

in a process of ethical cultivation. Moreover, the Chinese had no notion of catharsis and generally assumed that fiction (if not all literature) should serve didactic purposes.”²⁴⁵

With the heritage of didactic tradition, Chinese literature reformed realism by emphasising its functional effect, especially social efficacy. In its actual operation, realism encouraged more of an aesthetic withdrawal than an activist engagement in social issues. In contrast, most Western realists have a different attitude toward realism, seeking verisimilitude and authenticity. “Indeed, many of the greatest practitioners of realism in the West (one thinks of Chekhov, Flaubert, James, and the early Joyce) consciously placed the interests of art above politics and pursued in their works a highly rarefied aesthetic detachment.”²⁴⁶ They did not face the tremendous political interference like their imitators in China, since Republican Chinese literature was largely politicised. As Lee remarks,

“A process of politicization was set in motion as most writers’ sympathies gradually drifted toward the left. Most literary historians agree that the May Thirtieth incident marked a crucial turning point: modern Chinese literature moved, in the memorable phrase of Ch’eng Fang-wu, from ‘literary revolution’ to ‘revolutionary literature’”²⁴⁷

In effect, through this process of politicisation, social realism turns into socialist realism. Regarding Zhang Tianyi’s works, as C.T. Hsia argues “roughly a third of his stories are standard proletarian exercises in the manner of Socialist Realism”.²⁴⁸ From the late 1920s, the vast majority of May Fourth writers leaned towards the left and started to embrace political slogans like “proletarian literature” and “revolutionary literature”, due to the harsh reality of Republican China. Lu Xun, who was one of the leading figures of May Fourth literature, also “put an end to his inner torment and chose to confront the concrete realities of Chinese society by taking up his essay –

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 24.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁴⁷ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, “Literary Trends: The Road to Revolution 1927-1949” in John K. Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 422.

²⁴⁸ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 214.

writing on behalf of the 'leftist' cause."²⁴⁹ Lu Xun's approach to socialist literature typified the trend of literary politicisation which began from the late 1920s. This overwhelming political commitment dominated the modern Chinese literary arena through the 1930s and 1940s, which eventually put an end to individualism and subjectivism. Under this circumstance, as a leftist writer, Zhang Tianyi's fiction was turning towards revolution.

Compared to Republican China, the frequency of direct conflict in British society was relatively low. Republican Chinese writers feared the death of the nation (wangguo 亡國) through civil wars or foreign invasion (from the Sino-British Opium War to the Second Sino-Japanese War). This more complicated conflict put May Fourth writers in a harsher sociopo-litical context. Modern Chinese writers tend to criticise the social system more radically. Many intellectuals felt that people's livelihoods needed to be improved, human dignity needed to be restored and the harsh social reality pushed many intellectuals to the left, particularly from the mid-1920s onwards. They eagerly hoped for a new age. The more progressive Chinese writers could not afford to ignore reality. They kept on struggling with the miserable national situation and hoping for a brighter future. Hence, they were always haunted by the conflict between ideal and reality. Many May Fourth and post-May Fourth writers shared this fate.

Compared to Zhang, Dickens is milder in criticising the social system. His attitude lacks the power of destructiveness and thoroughness. George Orwell argues:

"Fasten upon this or that minor abuse, expose it, drag it into the open, bring it before a British jury, and all will be well – that is how he sees it...There is no clear sign that he wants the existing order to be overthrown, or that he believes it would make very much difference if it were overthrown."²⁵⁰

Dickens's criticism of the social system is almost exclusively moral; he posits that individual kindness is the remedy for everything.

²⁴⁹ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "Literary Trends I: The Quest for Modernity, 1895–1927" in John K. Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol.12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 499.

²⁵⁰ George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", in George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, no.1), 416.

“It seems that in every attack Dickens makes upon society he is always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure.... His approach is always along the moral plane... Useless to change institutions without a ‘change of heart’ – that, essentially, is what he is always saying.”²⁵¹

Dickens’s main target is not the social system but human nature. What Dickens considers is an issue like this: the change in a social system is useless unless humanity is improved. Throughout human history, bad things happen, and the reason is unchangeable human nature. Changing the social system alone cannot bring fundamental change to the social hierarchical system and achieve Utopia, since the superstructure, in Marxist terminology, remains unaltered. What concerns Dickens is how to improve human nature, not the social system. Therefore, Dickens is not an obstinate conservative, but has his own progressiveness. He also emphasises reformation, but from a different perspective. He focuses on the progress of the human race and morality, rather than the social system that he believes is not the key problem.

Compared to Dickens’s milder criticism, Zhang’s attitude towards the social system is radical and conveys a sharper mode of conflict and agony. As a leftist writer, Zhang was radical and political as this was mainstream at the time. In the Victorian era, Dickens was relatively free, and could indicate his own standpoint without the intervention of the mainstream. Actually, Dickens arguably leads the social mainstream of his time. British people put more emphasis on Christmas Day because of Dickens’s “Christmas Carol” and they paid more attention to the children in schools and workhouses after they read *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist*. Dickens’s influence on the Victorian era was so huge, it even made some positive changes in society, which was exactly what Dickens wanted – a social reformation. The Victorian era responded to what Dickens wrote about.

However, Zhang received no reply, so he remained unsatisfied, and thus the power of his criticism of the social system is far stronger than Dickens’s. Social revolution

²⁵¹ Ibid., 427.

versus social reformation is the deepest discrepancy between Zhang and Dickens.

Section II: Attitudes towards Social Revolution, Zhang Tianyi, Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo

As discussed previously, Zhang Tianyi differs greatly from Dickens regarding his attitude towards social revolution, since there is a discrepancy in the strength of their criticisms of the social system. Zhang is an adamant communist fighter, a revolutionary writer. In his early life, Zhang had read Marx's works and used them as a tool to remould his world outlook. As his classmate Zhou Songdi 周頌棣 recalled, after a series of political events around 1924, Zhang thought a lot and was very enthusiastic about politics. When they were together, he always focused on the future of the motherland and the fate of people. In their conversation,

“They rarely talked about literature and art, but paid attention to politics, the development of the revolutionary situation, the triumph of the Northern Expeditionary Army and their recognition of revolution... they agreed that China has to rely on the Communists to drive out imperialism, beat warlords and build an independent, united, free and prosperous new China. The revolution launched by the Communists is radical, which is essential for current China.”²⁵²

Zhang's firm revolutionary ideas underpin his theory of “art for revolution”. “As a revolutionary critic, Zhang Tianyi has keen eyesight. He embraced the sense of mission of criticising old society and building a new world. He devoted himself to being a proletarian fighter in his literary career.”²⁵³ In a way, his attitude towards social revolution was very clear from the very beginning. Zhang's creation is for fighting; he recognises fiction as a weapon. He himself said,

“All of my works are like a soldier's spear in the revolutionary war, I use it to fight. I intend to expose various conflicts and characters in real life, especially unveil someone's hypocritical mask to show their true features. In the meantime,

²⁵² Zhou Songdi 周頌棣, “The Days I Spent with Tianyi” (Wo he Tianyi xiangchu de rizi 我和天翼相處的日子), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 67.

²⁵³ Du Yuanming 杜元明, *The papers on Zhang Tianyi's works (Zhang Tianyi xiaoshuo lungao 張天翼小說論稿)* (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1985), 4.

to indicate the oppressed people struggling and fighting in misery...to promote eliminating the dark social system... letting the readers know that in order to build the new world, revolution is the only way to go.”²⁵⁴

Thus, it might be safe to say, Zhang sees himself as a literary soldier. There is abundant revolutionary propaganda in Zhang’s works to indicate his fervour for revolution. In this category, there are many military short stories, for instance, “Twenty-One”, “The Bread Line”, “Road” and “The Last Train”. Each of them demonstrates the whole process of the revolt of the lower class against the superstructure, and the process invariably involves violence. In addition, they all have a victorious ending. Therefore, Zhang advocates revolution, in its most extreme form, with powerful emotions like envy, hate, wrath and hysteria. No middle ground, no compromise, only bullets, blood and death.

Take “The Bread Line” (1931) as an example. Although it is not quite a military story, the protagonists are soldiers. This is a short story about wounded soldiers helping people to revolt against the government due to a shortage of grain in the city. The rice shops are closed as a department of government is hoarding rice as a rare commodity. After the rice in all the rice shops has sold out, the government can sell the rice for the highest price and make a large profit. Many hungry people gather in front of the gate of the government department. They know huge stocks of rice are stored in a government building, but it is still closed, as the official wants to wait for the price to rise. A couple of wounded soldiers pass by, already feeling dissatisfied about their treatment after their injuries. By seeing this phenomenon, their complaints turn into wrath. They wait until 3pm in the afternoon, which is the time that the police are promising to open the gate and sell rice. However, the police fail to live up to their promises. Soon the situation gets out of control. With the help of the wounded soldiers (one of them has a gun), the crowd rushes in and shares the rice. In the end, the wounded soldiers take off their military uniforms and become ordinary people.

I selected this short story because the rebels are composed of two groups of people:

²⁵⁴ See Zhang Tianyi’s preface in Zhang Tianyi, *Anthology of Zhang Tianyi’s Short Stories* (Zhang Tianyi duanpian xiaoshuo xuanji 張天翼短篇小說選集) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1981), 2,3.

wounded soldiers and civilians. Of course, the soldiers were also civilians before they joined the army, but their current identity and the transformation of their identity at the end shows the mode of rebellion that Zhang recognises. Since rebellion is violent and needs weapons, the normal people do not stand a chance without military force. Hence, uniting with soldiers is a convenient way to lead a successful rebellion for oppressed people. In order to unite military forces, their emotional bond should be emphasised. First of all, the soldiers were farmers, they joined the army to make a living. Soldiers and people share the same roots – poverty, desperation and hunger. In addition, they share the same emotion – hatred. The soldiers hated their current identity when they were still ordinary people. Zhou Jin 周進, one of the soldiers recalls a similar revolt: “He was still a farmer. There were also many soldiers and people. After this chaos, he hated soldiers fervently. But finally he also became a soldier. He had no choice, otherwise he would die of starvation.”²⁵⁵ They became what they hated just to eat their fill. But ultimately, they are still people. They hate power and wealth and this has never changed, just like all the other indignant people. This kind of strong emotion ties soldiers and people together very tightly. Another emotion is wrath, which is a key element of revolution. The people are oppressed by society, and the soldiers are oppressed by military officers.

“Their anger comes from the humiliation and starvation they experienced in the army. Now this wrath adheres to this incident: they want to make it bigger. ‘Hey old sport, what do you want?’ Lin Baoyong 林保勇 asks a man between thirty and forty. ‘What do I want? I want to eat!’ He blinks his eyes: big eye sockets and the whites of his eyes, which appear rather fierce. Lin Baoyong finds hostility in these eyes.”²⁵⁶

In Zhang’s view, the wrath of the people is the soil of revolution. The soldiers respect and accept this wrath. Finally, they gather together as they share the same enemy – the social system, as if rivers roll to the sea. The wounded soldiers fought for a living in the army, now they are fighting for their own interests. In the chaos, “The wounded soldiers don’t even think about what is going to happen in the next minute or next

²⁵⁵ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “The Bread Line” (Mianbao xian 麵包線), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 194.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 187.

second, they feel hot all over, even more excited than in the battlefield.”²⁵⁷ They are more courageous than ever. After the rebellion, they take off their military uniforms, which symbolises the formal transformation of their identity. Their dual identities combine into one and they become stronger and more confident.

Furthermore, there is a hint at the very end of the story. When the soldiers get out of the city, a guard asks where they are going. They answer “outside the east gate”.²⁵⁸ The robbery occurs the following day and the location is exactly “outside the east gate”. This implies that the wounded soldiers started robbing and the story ends here. All these demonstrations are positive. It is easy to figure out. Zhang commends their behaviour, or at least he approves of it. The end of the story is described as a triumph. The relevant punishments are absent. In this story, Zhang describes an integrated revolution, with its cause, processes and the result. It indicates Zhang’s attitude, that revolution is the only way for people in Republican China. Obviously, considering his attitude towards revolution, Zhang resolves to overthrow the old social system and construct a new socialist system. As a result, he rejects the social reformism which Dickens advocates.

Unlike Zhang, who advocates communism, Dickens is inclined to capitalism. In addition, Dickens is a distinct conservative, a defender of tradition. If Zhang is leftist, then Dickens is definitely rightist. The main concept of his literary works is that capitalists should be nice to people and should possess benevolence while workers should not strike and rebel. As George Orwell points out: “His whole ‘message’ is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent.”²⁵⁹ From Dickens’s viewpoint, the aim of criticising the social system is not to overturn it, but to make it better. This attitude is rather like Leo Tolstoy. Both Dickens and Leo Tolstoy share the standpoint of giving advice to capitalist society. They are both mild reformists. Dickens’s neutral attitude towards strikes can be shown through the description of Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*. In a way, Stephen is a mouthpiece for Dickens. He does not attend the labour union but also rejects betraying the name of the leader of the labour union to his

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 194.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 197.

²⁵⁹ George Orwell, “Charles Dickens”, in George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, no.1), 417.

boss Mr. Bounderby. His attitude is firm: “but I can tell him what I know will never do’t. The strong hand will never do’t. Vict’ry and triumph will never do’t.”²⁶⁰ Stephen considers that the strike is innocent but definitely not the best solution to solving the problem between capitalists and workers. If the strike goes further and turns into rebellion, then he would forcefully oppose that, which means he definitely opposes revolution. I believe that Stephen’s attitude towards strike, rebellion and revolution is the very same as Dickens’s. At the end of the novel, the owner of the circus, Mr. Sleary, shakes hands with Mr. Gradgrind, representing the reconciliation between capitalists and the toiling masses. This is the solution that Dickens prefers – nice capitalists and grateful people, everyone is kind and lenient and the world is harmonious.

Basically, Dickens is disgusted with and afraid of revolution. This can be seen in his novels *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. In these two novels, Dickens deals with revolution in a very narrow way. In *Barnaby Rudge*, the violent incident is more like chaos rather than revolution. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, all the descriptions of the hysteria of revolutionists and the Jacobin dictatorship leave the readers the impression that revolution is horrible and dreadful, like a monster. In Dickens’s description, the revolutionaries represented by Madame Defarge are the new oppressors who have risen on the destruction of the old. These revolutionaries are the same as Napoleon in *Animal Farm*, who builds a far more brutal, awful and tyrannical new empire after the revolution. Undeniably, this statement was powerfully proven by history.

Coincidentally, it is interesting to note that Madame Defarge and Zhang Tianyi have something in common. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Madame Defarge loses all of her family due to the dissolute and brutal behaviour of the French aristocracy. Her original intention of revolution derived from vengeance and so did Zhang Tianyi’s. Zhang once recalled when he studied in Peking University:

“I found that Chinese people must rise up in revolution; this idea comes from the thoughts of revenge. When I was a kid, I heard from my parents that my

²⁶⁰ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995), 119.

uncle was a rich official and he once bullied and oppressed us. I wanted to take revenge on those rich officials since then.”²⁶¹

This is the very personal reason that Zhang accepts Marxism and the theory of class struggle. The negative description of Madame Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities* shows that Dickens takes the opposite view. Dickens is firmly against all kinds of violence, which destroys precious human life. It should not exist, no matter what reasons or purposes. From his viewpoint, what comes from vengeance cannot be good.

According to the polarised views on social revolution of Dickens and Zhang, I intend to go further. Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo once met in Paris in 1846.²⁶² Years later, Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*, and Hugo finished his last novel – *Ninety-Three*. Both Dickens’s and Hugo’s political views are clearly shown in these two novels. Combining *Les Misérables*, *Ninety-Three* and *A Tale of Two Cities* together, I believe that Hugo and Dickens share the same cornerstone of thought, which is humanitarianism. They are branches growing in different directions but share deep roots in humanitarian soil.

Apart from basic principles like mercy, universal love and forgiveness, Dickensian humanitarianism mainly reflects a principle that absolutely opposed all kinds of violence, which was fully represented by Dickens’s later period work *A Tale of Two Cities*. As a historical novel, the denial of violence in *A Tale of Two Cities* is radical. Dickens placed the violence of the French aristocracy and the violence of French revolution at the same level, being critical of both. Whenever and whatever, Dickens always stands with the weak and the victims. When the weak get the upper hand, Dickens’s standpoint also changes relatively and turns to new fragile victims, always sympathising with the weak. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens was deeply sympathetic to the oppressed people, and blames the luxurious life of the French aristocracy before the French revolution. Then in the Reign of Terror, Dickens immediately changed the target of attack. He denounced the terror and tyranny of the French revolutionary government, opposing the use of violence against violence, evil against

²⁶¹ Zhang Tianyi, “Writer’s Statement, Zhang Tianyi” (Zuojia zishu, Zhang Tianyi 作家自述.张天翼) in “Modern Chinese Literature Studies” 1980, 02.

²⁶² Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 327.

evil. He considered that the French revolution committed injustice in the name of justice. His theory is that any justice that leads to injustice cannot be real justice.

When encountering hatred, cruelty and violence, the two characters in *A Tale of Two Cities* use their love and tolerance to overcome problems. One example of this is Dr. Manette who was wrongfully imprisoned for eighteen years and caused his family's ruin. After his release, his goodness, tolerance and love overcame his hatred. He agreed to let his precious daughter marry the descendant of his enemy who harmed him. When his son-in-law was jailed, Dr. Manette tried his best to save him. Another example is Sydney Carton. He loved Lucie Manette very deeply. However, when his rival in love (Charles Darnay, Lucie's husband) is about to be executed, Carton rescues Charles by sacrificing his own life. Through describing these two decent and benevolent characters, Dickens conveys his humanitarian theory incisively and vividly, which issues a thorough rejection of violence and hatred.

It is meaningful to introduce Victor Hugo's works here since they can be reflections of Dickens' works. Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* forms an interesting comparison that can help shed light on Zhang Tianyi and Dickens. In Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), there is a pattern of "three-people in dualism"²⁶³, which means two people at opposite poles and one person wandering around between them. The policeman Javert is the embodiment of law, his job is punishing evil in the name of the law. Jean Valjean once became the embodiment of crime because of harsh and unjust laws. Bishop Myriel is the embodiment of Christianity, forgiving everyone with benevolence and tolerance. In this pattern, Javert and Jean Valjean are situated at the two poles of the contradiction, they are the fundamental antithesis. Bishop Myriel is the character who conciliates the conflict. Valjean steals some silver from him, but Bishop Myriel saves Valjean from being arrested and thus inspires him to change his ways and become a kindhearted person. In the end, Javert is so shamed as Valjean returns good for evil that it makes him unbalanced and finally leads to his suicide. Hence, *Les Misérables* conveys Hugo's thought: as a form of violence, law and prison cannot make people develop goodness, only make them worse. Only Christian love saves people, changes people, and changes the world. In this way, it

²⁶³ Liu Mingjiu 柳鳴九, "Preface to translation" (Yiben xu 譯本序), in Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Li Dan, Fangyu (Beijing: renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1992), 5.

seems that Hugo is like Dickens; both of them reckon that only benevolence and love can save the world. Regarding the character of Bishop Myriel, Liu Mingjiu 柳鳴九 has argued that:

“Hugo not only endows him with the meaning of moral and ethical bourgeois humanitarianism, but also endows him with some kind of meaning of historical driving forces...Hugo puts the principles of universal love, humanitarianism and influence, represented by bishop Myriel, as the opposite of revolution, war and violence, represented by the members of the National Convention. Hugo takes this sort of bourgeois humanitarian love as the most reasonable and effective way to reform the society.”²⁶⁴

However, does Hugo oppose revolution and violence in a manner similar to Dickens? The answer is not, I think. The most apparent difference between Hugo and Dickens is that Hugo agrees with benevolence and love, as well as revolution and violence. Hugo acknowledges that love is the best way to save the world, but “there is always more misery among the lower classes than there is humanity in the higher.”²⁶⁵ He considers that humanity needs revolution to push itself to be better. Since the spiritual and moral progress of the human race is too slow, the progress of the social system should take the first priority. Humans should use advanced social institutions to restrict ugly human nature, thereby to improve it, and thus help lead to spiritual and moral renewal.

Actually, the benevolent spirit endorsed by both Dickens and Hugo and Zhang’s violent revolution come into conflict during an intense conversation at the beginning of *Les Misérables*. Bishop Myriel, representing humanitarian love, asks a member of the National Convention, representing violence and revolution, the representative of the people: “You have demolished. To demolish may be useful, but I distrust a demolition effected in anger!”²⁶⁶ The conventionist refutes that:

“Justice has its anger, Monsieur Bishop, and the wrath of justice is an element of

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁶⁵ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Charles E. Wilbour (London: Everyman’s Library, 1909), 16.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 46.

progress... the French revolution had its reasons. Its wrath will be pardoned by the future; its result is a better world. From its most terrible blows comes a caress for the human race....Yes, the brutalities of progress are called revolutions. When they are over, this is recognized: that the human race has been harshly treated, but that it has advanced.”²⁶⁷

In fact, the result of this debate is ambiguous. There is no outcome. Since this is the debate of right and right. Both of them fight for the progress of the human race and they share the same aim, but one deals with morality (Dickens), and the other deal with the social system (Zhang Tianyi). Hugo put humanitarianism first but after that, he also agrees with revolution. However, Dickens completely disagrees with revolution. When we look at the whole picture, when compared to Dickens, Hugo is closer to Zhang. This is also a pattern of “three-people in dualism”; Dickens and Zhang represent the two poles, the benevolent love and the violence, respectively. Hugo wanders around in the middle but is closer to Zhang Tianyi.

Hugo is very clear about his attitude towards revolution in *Les Misérables*,

“...the great political, revolutionary, and philosophic sap. There, as we have said, all is noble, pure, worthy, and honourable. There, it is true, men may be deceived and are deceived, but there error is venerable, so much heroism does it imply. For the sum of all work which is done there, there is one name: Progress.”²⁶⁸

Hugo admits that the revolution is a great work of human beings, and it does contain the great meaning of humanitarianism. He praises the French Revolution sincerely in the novel and this seems to represent Hugo’s own views:

“The French Revolution, which is nothing more nor less than the ideal armed with the sword, started to its feet, and by the very movement, closed the door of evil and opened the door of good. It cleared up the question, promulgated truth, drove away miasma, purified the century, crowned the people. We may say of it

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 46, 50.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 711.

that it created man a second time, in giving him a second soul, his rights.”²⁶⁹

Regarding the issue of violent revolution, Hugo is calm and conscious. He does not blindly accept all the violence that the lower class levies against the superstructure. In order to avoid misleading readers, Hugo differentiates revolution, insurrection and riot very carefully and in detail:

“In all questions which spring from the collective sovereignty, the war of the whole against the fraction is insurrection; the attack of the fraction against the whole is an *emeute*... There is no insurrection but forward. Every other rising is evil; every violent step backwards is an *emeute*; to retreat is an act of violence against the human race. Insurrection is the Truth’s access of fury; the paving stones which insurrection tears up, throw off the spark of right.”²⁷⁰

In addition, here is the definition of revolution, insurrection and *emeute*, as well as their delicate relation: “there are accepted insurrections which are called revolutions; there are rejected revolutions which are called *emeutes*. An insurrection breaking out is an idea passing its examination before the people. If the people drops its black ball, the idea is withered fruit; the insurrection is an *affray*.”²⁷¹ Hence, it is the people who legitimise the insurrections. The positive ones are revolutions, the negative are riots.

As I have mentioned before, Hugo hovers between Dickens and Zhang Tianyi in terms of revolutionary zeal, but on the whole, he is more inclined to take Zhang’s view. However, the difference between Hugo and Zhang is still tremendous, since Hugo agrees with benevolence and love, as well as revolution and violence. This point of view contains an inherent contradiction. The contradiction of Hugo’s viewpoint is that he agrees with revolution but cannot accept all that comes with it. He can understand revolution but cannot accept the harsh reality of revolution. More specifically, this is the conflict between the reign of terror of revolutionary government and the principle of humanitarianism. Hugo amplifies this inner

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 982.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 1035, 1036.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 1217.

contradiction in his last novel *Ninety-Three* (1874). Gauvain is the general of the revolutionary army and Cimourdain is the political commissar. Gauvain advocates giving lenient treatment to prisoners as he values most is human life. Conversely, Cimourdain stands for punishing all enemies severely as he regards the interest of the revolution to be of primary importance.

“Hence arose a conflict, hidden but deep, between these two men. The two stood in different atmospheres; both combating the rebellion, and each having his own thunder-bolt – that of the one, victory; that of the other, terror....These two men were the incarnation – the one of life, the other of death; the one was the principle of destruction, the other of peace, and they loved each other.”²⁷²

First of all, Cimourdain is correct about violence, he says:

“A surgeon resembles a butcher; a healer may have the appearance of an executioner. The Revolution devotes itself to its fatal work. It mutilates, but it saves... It holds the past; it will exterminate it. It makes a deep wound in civilization, from whence will spring health to the human race. ...The Revolution amputates the world. Hence this haemorrhage – ’93...The Revolution needs savage workmen to aid it. It pushes aside every hand that trembles. It has only faith in the inexorables.”²⁷³

Revolution mixes right and wrong. But Gauvain points out “Above the justice of revolutions is that of humanity.” ²⁷⁴ Therefore, Cimourdain executes Gauvain. Gauvain represents Hugo, both of them agree with revolution but oppose violence. Cimourdain represents inexorable revolution, which also represents Zhang Tianyi. In a manner, the French Revolution executes Hugo. The revolution is furious and there is no room for deceleration. Nevertheless, Hugo would like to yoke the revolution with a humanitarian bond. He wants to use humanity’s conscience as the compass of the revolution. The Utopia in Hugo’s heart is higher than the Utopia of revolution. “Above the balance is the lyre. Your Republic weighs, measures, regulates man;

²⁷² Victor Hugo, *Ninety-Three*, trans. Frank Lee Benedict (New York: Harper&Brothers, 1874), 206.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 209, 210.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 314.

mine lifts him into the open sky; it is the difference between a theorem and an eagle.”²⁷⁵ What Hugo strives for is an impossible fantasy and he is doomed to failure.

Comparing *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Ninety-Three*, it can be clearly seen that both Dickens and Hugo value humanitarianism above all. In that premise, Dickens is against revolutions, and Hugo approves of revolutions. Carton saves his rival Charles; Gauvain saves Lantenac who is the leader of the rebellion. Both of them sacrifice themselves to save people from prison. The former is for the happiness of the woman he loves while the latter is for his ideal – his Utopia. Both Carton and Gauvain are executed by the French Revolution. Carton represents love in a limited sense; nevertheless, Gauvain represents the highest ideal.

Therefore, Hugo is more idealistic than both Dickens and Zhang Tianyi. Both Dickens and Zhang’s ideals, reform and revolution, can be achieved. But Hugo’s ideal – revolution without violence – is impossible. The relationship between Dickens, Zhang Tianyi and Hugo resembles a scalene triangle. Hugo is the vertice, who is closer to Zhang but they will never overlap. Dickens and Zhang are at the base line. They are situated on both ends of the line and keep their feet on the ground. All of them are idealistic, but Hugo is doomed to fail. Both Dickens and Zhang achieved their success in their own country: capitalistic reform in the United Kingdom and revolution in China. Hugo, however, will never succeed. This is the relationship between Dickens, Zhang and Hugo’s attitudes toward revolutions.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 344.

Section III: Opinions on Artistry

Due to differing views on the role of art, Zhang Tianyi and Dickens have varying opinions on artistry. Zhang believes that “Every art fights for the interests of certain groups of people.”²⁷⁶ He disagrees with the aesthetic thought of “art for art”, but advocates “art for life”. In his literary works, every piece serves the theme and the development of characters, and all that could be omitted is omitted. He neither writes about side issues irrelevant to the theme, nor poetical descriptions. In addition, environmental descriptions are also very rare. In a word, Zhang emphasises the function of literature, rather than the aesthetics.

Zhang recognises the social utility and value of literature; he considers most Republican Chinese literature to be “just a tool”²⁷⁷. He declared the five rules of his literature creation in an essay. Among them was “Four, do not waste time on writing scenery descriptions that are irrelevant to the main theme. Five, do not write unnecessary details.”²⁷⁸ Zhang has his own special narrative strategy: he likes leaps and omissions. In his narrative, Zhang emphasises the actions and emotions of characters, tries to omit the general demonstration of the events and avoids detailed description of the story. This might be inherited from the traditional narrative style of classical Chinese literature, which has the characteristic of concise and precise description. So Yang Yi notes that Zhang “does not avoid writing scenery descriptions, but he combines them with plot development. Let me draw an analogy: the scenery descriptions in his works are the suitable clothes worn on the body of the plot, rather than the clothes hanging in a shopping mall.”²⁷⁹

For instance, at the end of “Lu Baotian”, Lu is sick in bed and does not know he has been fired, but he still wants to work at home. The description of Lu’s flat reads: “The room smells sour, combines with moistness and mustiness. A faint light goes through his window on the desk. As if the setting sun struggles to rise again, still wants to

²⁷⁶ Zhang Tianyi, “Art and Struggle” (Yishu yu douzheng 藝術與鬥爭), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuangzuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 134.

²⁷⁷ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “The letter of Tianyi” (Tianyi de xin 天翼的信), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 128.

²⁷⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “The story of creation” (Chuangzuo de gushi 創作的故事), Ibid., 421.

²⁷⁹ Yang Yi 楊義, “See Zhang Tianyi in History of Modern Chinese literature” (Cong xiandai xiaoshuoshi kan Zhang Tianyi 從現代小說史看張天翼), in Wu Fuhui, eds. *Zhang Tianyi lun* (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1987), 57.

draw everyone's attention, and thus desperately sends out its afterglow."²⁸⁰ It can be seen that this piece of description of the environment is tightly bound to the plot of the story. When describing the gloomy and indigent circumstances of Lu Baotian's room, Zhang mixes Lu's death struggle in the desperate situation with the environmental description, the setting sun resembling Lu. This shows the miserable and restless soul of the character.

The characteristic of Zhang's scenery description is that it is closely linked to his characters. Zhang does not like the scenery descriptions of an author like Turgenev. He argues:

"Indeed, these are beautiful words, but I don't like some parts of them, I recognise them as unnecessary parts. The author is just interested in the scenes that are irrelevant to the characters. He is describing scenes just for scenes....However, read what Gorky writes, which is totally different: the sea, the grassland, the street, the sky, the rain and wind, any creatures, all exist for the characters or describing the feelings of the characters. By reading this, we can feel that we are breathing the exact Russian air that those characters breathe."²⁸¹

Apparently, environmental descriptions similar to Gorky is what Zhang accepts. He emphasises the close connection between environmental description and the theme of text. In his view, all descriptions should serve the plots and characters and all else is redundant.

In this respect, Dickens is the complete opposite of Zhang. "The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing is the unnecessary detail."²⁸² Those "unnecessary details" in his literary works are irrelevant shining baubles, helping to form the unique atmosphere of his novels. They become Dickens's imprint.

²⁸⁰ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Lu Baotian" (陸寶田), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.4 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 231.

²⁸¹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "About the National Form of Literature and Art" (Guanyu wenyi de minzu xingshi 關於文藝的民族形式), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi lun chuanguo*, (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1982), 160.

²⁸² George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", in George Orwell, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968, no.1), 450.

In Dickens's works, there are many details that are totally irrelevant to the plot, theme and leading characters but still give the reader a sense of place and tone. For instance, in *Great Expectations*, the entirety of Chapter XXXI is the description of a terrible and amusing Hamlet show performed by Mr. Wopsle's drama troupe. Deleting this chapter would not have any influence on the narrative as it is totally unnecessary. This phenomenon frequently occurs in Dickens's novels, especially in his early career. *The Pickwick Papers* is a convenient example that has been mentioned before repeatedly. In this novel, nearly every chapter is an independent, integrated, rich and colorful narrative unit. Many details or even plots are unnecessary, like chapters III, VI, VII, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVII and so forth. These sections could be deleted without any concern about a disruption of the narration, although this would cut around half of the whole novel. On these unnecessary side issues, Dickens's imagination rages like a violent hurricane and eventually engulfs everything, even the storyline. In his novels, details on a minor character normally triple the details given about an ordinary character in another writer's works. One thing links to another, detail attaches another detail, and decoration leads to further decoration.

In addition, regarding environmental and scenic descriptions, Dickens is generous. We see this in the exquisite description of Coketown in *Hard Times* and the purple prose of the description of the storm in *David Copperfield*. Dickens does emphasise the realistic social function of literature, but also the aesthetic pursuit. Whilst Zhang advocates "art for life", Dickens's advocacy might be summarised as "art for life and art".

Overall, Dickens's and Zhang's opinions on artistry are different. If both Dickens's and Zhang's concepts of literary realism can be considered as "art for life", the latter's realism is more coloured by utilitarianism, is more full of a sense of urgency, and is a more neglected artistry than the former's. This difference is related to the era and social environment to which they belonged. Dickens's social environment is not as suffocating and pressing as the social environment in China in the 1930s. Leo Ou-fan Lee notes,

"After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, the artistic side of this modern

quest was overshadowed by political exigency. The value of creative literature was reduced to a position subservient to politics, in spite of its constant socio-political dimension.”²⁸³

Most of the May Fourth literature was utilitarian and appeared with very heavy political colours, and from a less aesthetic point of view. Republican Chinese authors always wanted to create a sort of literary fiction that spoke to the historical mission of national salvation. As Leo Ou-Fan Lee notes “The utopias of new China offered to writers and readers alike both an ebullient political vision – the wish-fulfilment of their shared obsession with the fate of China – and a romantic escape from the problems of the contemporary scene.”²⁸⁴ For May Fourth writers, the interest of Chinese national progress was of far higher importance than their personal aesthetic ambitions.

²⁸³ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, “Literary Trends I: The Quest for Modernity, 1895–1927” in John K. Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol.12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 504.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 459,460.

Section IV: Pessimism and Optimism

In his novels, Dickens created a series of malignant characters through exaggeration and satirical techniques, and thereby mercilessly reveals and criticises the dark and vicious personalities of villains. For instance, the Murdstone brother and sister, Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*, and Madame Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities* almost all embody the full gamut of dark elements of human nature and are representatives of evil.

When building villains, Zhang Tianyi uses the same skills as Dickens did, which can also be seemed as a parallel. As C.T. Hsia argues: “Few of his contemporaries have grasped so clearheadedly and dispassionately his satiric and tragic view of man’s fundamental perversity and his disposition for evil.”²⁸⁵ The villains he creates include Third Great-Grandfather (San taiye 三太爺) in “Third Great-Grandfather and Guisheng” (San taiye yu guisheng 三太爺與桂生), First Great-Grandfather (Zhang taiye 長太爺) in “Back and Breasts”, Ninth Tyrant (Jiu ye 九爺) in “Smile”, and other landlords and despots, all of whom expose the dark sides of human nature, such as greediness, hypocrisy, dirtiness, and shamelessness. Those characters are hated and disdained by people as there aren’t any redeeming qualities in their characters.

However, in this respect, differences between Zhang Tianyi and Dickens are also obvious. Considering the degree to which the dark sides of human nature were revealed, Zhang’s fiction seems more thorough and extensive than Dickens’s. As Wu Fuhui remarks, “He only describes the ugly faces of the characters to a great extent. What he focuses on exploring is only the evilness.”²⁸⁶ In all of his works except fairy tales, we can hardly find any positive characters helping protagonists to solve the problems. Nevertheless, in Dickens’s works, the nice rich man is frequently encountered. Furthermore, nearly all of Dickens’s novels have a bright and happy ending, with probably only *The Old Curiosity Shop* as the only exception, since the protagonist Little Nell dies in the end, but the antagonist Quilp is also drowned. In

²⁸⁵ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 223.

²⁸⁶ Wu Fuhui 吳福輝, “Sharp. Fresh. Exaggerated—On the characters and description skills of Zhang Tianyi’s satirical novels” (Fengli. xinxian. kuazhang—shilun Zhang Tianyi fengci xiaoshuo de renwu jiqi miaoxie yishu 鋒利. 新鮮. 誇張——試論張天翼諷刺小說的人物及其描寫藝術), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 394.

contrast, most of Zhang's works have a tragic or relatively ambiguous ending. This indicates their discrepancies on their views of life: in a way, Zhang is a pessimist while Dickens is an optimist.

Apart from revolutionary propaganda being presented in a positive way, most of Zhang's works have bad or so-called grey (ambiguous) endings. In the former category, the examples are numerous: in the end of "Third Great-Grandfather and Guisheng", Guisheng and his elder sister are tortured and buried alive by Third Great-Grandfather. The narrator describes the whole process in great detail. There is no last minute rescue, no nice people or heroes to stand up for them and the punishment for Third Great-Grandfather's murder is absent. As the narrator says: "Until the next year, the Dragon Boat Festival had passed and there was not a little bit of trouble for Third Great-Grandfather. Then I left."²⁸⁷

Even in a story narrated from a child's perspective, the ending is also awful. In the end of "Bees", the narrator's father and elder brother, as well as many friends of his, are executed without trial. He has become an orphan, though he does not have a clue. The oppressive government is also still there, without any trace of improvement. As shown, this kind of absence of justice is very common in Zhang's fiction, since the social background is what should be blamed and thus the problem always remains unsolved at the endings of his works.

In the end of "Harvest Year" (Fengnian 豐年, 1933), Gen Sheng 根生 is shot due to his crime of robbery. The landlords are joyful for the harvest year and no one grieves his death except the shooter, who is a friend from his hometown. In this story, the shooter is ironically the protector of Gen Sheng in the city. This symbolically indicates that the society is supposed to protect people, but actually it kills them.

"An Ordinary Thing" (Yijian xunchangshi 一件尋常事, 1933) is full of domestic violence. The man beats his wife and child and gets drunk whenever he gets a little money from pawnshops. Finally the wife dies of an illness and the family is broken up. This story is full of violence and ends in a complete tragedy, and the chief culprit

²⁸⁷ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Third Great-Grandfather and Guisheng" (Santaiye yu guisheng 三太爺與桂生), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 96.

is poverty indeed. In this kind of story, the solution is always absent as the problem derives from social institutions.

Obviously, what the author wants to convey is that the only solution is revolution. Regarding the latter category, the vast majority of Zhang's works describing the grey life of petty bureaucrats, the bourgeoisie, social climbers and intellectuals have ambiguous or dark endings. The end of "Revenge" indicates the meaningless evil thought of the young intellectual who tries to make his ex-girlfriend pregnant; at the end of "Leather Belt", Deng Bingsheng 鄧炳生 has his broken dreams of promotion. More ironically, he signs the paper that kicks him out of the office himself.

"The Sorrows of Pig Guts" offers insights into the married life of a famous writer who does not love his wife, not even a little bit. He marries his wife only for her money. In the end, he becomes furious at an article that suggests he is behind the times. What this famous intellectual pursues is nothing but money and fame, focusing on his luxurious life and taking no social responsibility.

The end of "Fatalism and Fortune-telling", shows that Shu Keji feels regret about betraying his friend Lin Kejun. All of the applause from his colleagues and the promotion afterwards just makes him guiltier. The rest of his life will be accompanied by remorse. The success of his career only exacerbates his feelings of emptiness. The reason is that the nature of his job is against human morality and the existence of this profession (espionage) is due to a failure in the social context.

At the end of "Counter-attack", there is a dilemma for the protagonist Cheng Yeheng, as he complains "All in all, I was very unlucky. The Communists claimed I was a local tyrant, while the local tyrant framed me for being a Communist. I've been through a lot, life is so hard!...The local tyrant is as sharp as a razor...I lost my home and have been imprisoned for two years."²⁸⁸ Obviously, this dumbfounding situation for an intellectual is worse than a grey life.

²⁸⁸ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Counter-attack" (Fangong 反攻), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 483, 484.

In addition, positive characters are very rare in Zhang's works. Whenever protagonists encounter crises, no one comes out to help with the problems they face, they are always defeated by the reality in the end. But there are a few short stories that involve assistance, which is a branch of Zhang's military stories. For instance, "Twenty-One" describes a mutiny. Soldiers kill the squad leader, scare the company commander away and then find a wounded enemy by accident: "They also have company commanders, squad leaders and a fucking commander in chief, just like us." Said Laixing 來興. 'Exactly.' Shen Zhenguo 沈振國 walks to his side. 'They must not have got porridge in their hometown either and then joined the army, damn it...Hey, buddy, can you hold on and stand up?'"²⁸⁹ Just a few words achieve a shocking effect. Everyone was starving, exploited by their commander in chief and bullied by their leaders. Finally, they understand that they are all the same. Therefore, they stand together and help each other.

"Hatred" is a similar story. A group of refugees are roaming wild to avoid the chaos caused by war. Nearly all of these refugees have been bullied and humiliated by soldiers, so they hate them. Primarily, they see a dying coolie who was injured by soldiers. His horrible physical condition provokes the refugees' sympathy. This coolie soon dies, becoming a symbol that represents all those injured and killed by soldiers. These refugees rethink the miserable experience of their son, daughter, wife and their bleak hometown. All these thoughts strengthen their hatred towards soldiers. They swear that they will have their vengeance if they get a chance. Soon, on their way, they meet with three soldiers and one of them is seriously wounded. The soldiers are scary as they know that people hate them fiercely. The refugees run to them as if they are crazy. A young fellow bites the shoulder of a soldier, and then they would even like to eat or bury the soldiers. However, they find that these soldiers have nothing, just like themselves, and have nowhere to go. The soldiers are so confused, they don't understand why and how they came to this.

"Why do people hate them so much? They could not recall ever harming people. Instead, they themselves suffered a lot. They often starved and could not see a woman for years. They go to the battlefield, charge, get shot and are

²⁸⁹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Twenty-One" (Er'shiyi ge 二十一個) in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 159.

stabbed. Deserters will be executed anyway. They miss their family, father and mother, wife, children, whose whereabouts are unknown. But civilians hate them.”²⁹⁰

After some random conversations, the refugees find that these soldiers are as poor as they are. The soldiers also did farm work, joining the army just to be fed. Now that their army has been beaten, they are roaming the wild. People realise that the soldiers also have families, born in villages. They are just poor people, exactly the same as them. People feel intimate with these soldiers immediately as they were them, oppressed by this era. The people's hatred gone, they offer their insufficient water to the soldiers and get them to join the team. In this case, suffering people offer help to those who suffer more. This kind of help is precious since all of them are suffering.

In these kind of stories, we can see how desperate and melancholic Zhang's depictions of life can be. In his world, to those miserable people, the only assistance comes from those who also suffer. Therefore, it is safe to say that Zhang's literary world is rather miserable. In this pessimistic grey world, we can barely find any embodiment or representative of justice and virtue. Accordingly, the punishment for evil is always absent. This is totally the opposite of the Dickensian world.

According to a contemporary critic, “the novels of Dickens can all be reduced to one phrase, to wit: Be good, and love”²⁹¹ This might be attributed to Dickens's puritanism. Undoubtedly, Dickens thought of himself as centrally a Christian. His moral values are typically Christian moral values. What he emphasised mostly were human values and human rights. Nevertheless, what he saw was a corrupt social system that was indifferent to basic humanitarian principles. Dickens sincerely sympathised with those poor folk and all of his fiction exposed the darkest side of his society. The centre of Dickensian humanitarianism is love. He advocated love in all of his works. What he believed was that humanitarianism can improve the human environment

²⁹⁰ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Hatred” (Chouhen 仇恨) in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 320.

²⁹¹ Hippolyte Taine, “Charles Dickens, son talent et ses oeuvres”, *Revue des Deux Mondes* February 1856 (later incorporated into his *History of English Literature*, book 5, chapter I, 1871, translated by H. Van Laun, see Stephen Wall, ed. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970), 103.

and achieve a better society. Thus, the representative of Dickensian love – the nice rich man – is recurrent frequently in Dickens's novels. This long list includes Mr. Pickwick in *The Pickwick Papers*; Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Lindsay Maylie in *Oliver Twist*; Charles and Ned Cheeryble in *Nicholas Nickleby*; The single gentleman, who is the estranged younger brother of Nell's grandfather in *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Betsey Trotwood in *David Copperfield* and so forth. They directly offer money, shelter or job positions to the protagonists.

For instance, Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Lindsay Maylie adopt Oliver Twist unofficially in sequence and finally help him gain his inheritance legitimately; the Brothers Cheeryble offer Nicolas a job in their bank when he had nowhere to go; Betsey Trotwood officially adopts David Copperfield when he was abused by his stepfather and ran away from home. All of them have faith in the goodness of mankind and become key figures in the development of the final happy endings of their novels.

Also, in most of Dickens's novels, with the assistance of kind people or even by coincidence, evil will finally be punished or lead to self-destruction, this is one of his humorous style as I analysed in chapter II section IV. The negative characters either die or are imprisoned: at the end of *The Pickwick Papers*, Alfred Jingle is sent to jail and Mr. Pickwick charitably bails him out; near the end of *Oliver Twist*, Fagin is captured and sentenced to be hanged. Bill Sikes, who is the murderer of his girlfriend Nancy, hangs himself while trying to escape; Ralph Nickleby, Nicholas's uncle and his principal antagonist in *Nicholas Nickleby*, commits suicide knowing his only son died as the best friend of his greatest enemy; Daniel Quilp, the primary villain in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, drowns when trying to escape from his pursuers; Uriah Heep, the main antagonist of *David Copperfield*, is imprisoned; Madame Therese Defarge, the main antagonist in *A Tale of Two Cities*, kills herself by her pistol discharging when she struggles with Miss Pross; Compeyson drowns in the Thames because of his fight with Magwitch in the river, etc. In most situations, the protagonists have their happy endings in Dickens's novels, since Dickens believes in the final triumph of good.

Hence, it can be seen from his novels that Dickens has a cheerful and optimistic view of human nature. Whatever darkness he sees in reality, he believes in the

original goodness of human nature. The nice rich man that recurrently occurs in his novels prove it convincingly. Of course, Dickens also has his low periods. The frequency of the presence of this group of people is rather high in Dickens's early literary period. Each novel has one or two, from *The Pickwick Papers* to *The Old Curiosity Shop*. However, in his middle and late period, the image of the nice rich man fades out to some extent. In *Hard Times*, Gradgrind might play this part slightly after his reformation. No one fits the model in *A Tale of Two Cities*; the rescuer Carton is actually poor and Charles, who he rescues, is not short of money. Also, it seems that Dickens, in his fifties, had understood the helplessness and powerlessness of kind individuals in society. Carton has to give up his life to save Charles, rather than just spend some money like in Dickens's earlier novels. In *Great Expectations*, Magwitch, the patron of Pip, was actually the escaped convict whose property was illegal. Nevertheless, in the last completed novel "*Our Mutual Friend*", the good rich man comes back in the person of Boffin. This means Dickens finally comes back to believing that kind-hearted Christian people will save a decaying society and everything will be well in the future, which makes his novels a return to adult fairy tales.

Therefore, from the characters and the content of their works, Zhang portrays a dark and bleak world while Dickens presents a brighter picture. There are three factors that may contribute to this difference. First of all, the different social context and era to which they belonged. Republican Chinese history was full of violence and bloodshed. Chinese might have collapsed due to multiple foreign invasions from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republican period. It is not surprising that Zhang's philosophy was towards pessimism, since he lived in this kind of era and social context. In addition, as an artist – especially a leftist writer – he would like to advocate revolution by using the power of tragedy. By contrast, during the Victorian era, Britain could claim to be the world's superpower, despite social inequality at home and burgeoning industrial rivals overseas. On the whole, the Victorian era was a rising period. In 1882, Great Britain became the largest empire that the world had ever seen. By the end of Victoria's reign, the British Empire extended over about one-fifth of the earth's surface and almost a quarter of the world's population at least theoretically owed allegiance to the "Queen Empress". Living in this powerful country certainly gave Dickens a different perspective on the various issues facing the nation.

Secondly, the differing levels of popularity of Zhang and Dickens should be taken into account. Zhang had less consideration of entertaining readers in his times, since as a revolutionary writer, literature was used as a weapon to arouse Chinese people's revolutionary consciousness. For him, tragedy was the best form to express his proposition and he would not change his style to cater for his audience. Of course, Zhang was by no means a popular writer. However, Dickens was regarded as the literary colossus of his age. His literary triumph was unprecedented in English-speaking countries. *The Pickwick Papers* was a big success, which made him world-famous, despite it being his first novel. As Edgar Johnson argues:

“...Sam Weller and his other friends, had become more than national figures – they had become a mania. Nothing like it had ever happened before. There were Pickwick chintzes, Pickwick cigars, Pickwick hats, Pickwick canes with tassels, Pickwick coats; and there were Weller corduroys and Boz cabs. There were innumerable plagiarisms, parodies, and sequels...”²⁹²

Dickens's success was so huge, the range almost covered all English-speaking countries. When *The Old Curiosity Shop* was still being published in instalments, his audiences were deeply concerned about the final fate of the protagonist – little Nell. “Waiting crowds at New York pier shouted to an incoming vessel, ‘Is Little Nell dead?’”²⁹³ In order to reach such popularity, Dickens had to consider the taste of the public. Especially when his novels were published in instalments, thousands of letters written by his readers poured into Dickens's mail box. Many of them told Dickens what kind of ending they wanted. Dickens was inevitably influenced by the wishes of his audiences, because his main aim was to entertain rather than educate them. This might be the reason that made him a literary phenomenon and one of the most popular writers in the world. Dickens's optimistic philosophy was one of the reasons for his astounding popularity.

Finally, the different religious views of Zhang and Dickens ought to be considered. No doubt, Zhang was an antitheist. He got in touch with Marxism when he was

²⁹² Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 110.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 179.

twenty-two. “Under the influence of some progressive classmates, he read some revolutionary magazines and started to believe in Marxism from the beginning of 1927... From then on, he reckoned that art creation should serve one’s own faith.”²⁹⁴ He considered revolution to be the only solution for China, since individual beneficence and conscientiousness were inefficient and outdated. In order to arouse Chinese people’s revolutionary consciousness, Zhang had to stick to revolutionary realism like other Left-Wing writers. In Zhang’s fiction, there are no happy endings as China was suffering, so everyone’s fate was due to the failure of Chinese society. According to the Marxist theory of class struggle, capitalists are the enemy of the proletariat; so there cannot be a nice rich man helping poor people. What Zhang wanted is for the poor to rise up and launch a revolution. They had to count on themselves, rather than the goodness, beneficence or love of rich people.

By contrast, Dickens was influenced by his Christian faith. As Dennis Walder remarks:

“Dickens’s religion was personal, and modest. If we are to believe what Blanchard Jerrold reported to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in July 1870 (pp.231-2) – and there is no reason why we should not – Dickens told the dying Lady Lovelace that he prayed twice daily. He said the same to two sons departing from under the parental wing...His own knowledge of the Bible, especially the preferred New Testament (and in particular the Gospel of St Matthew), as well as the Book of Common Prayer, is testified to by frequent, accurate and often surprisingly relevant allusion throughout his works.”²⁹⁵

Faith was absolutely an essential part of his development as a novelist. For him, Christianity was a scheme for making things pleasant, and this intention runs throughout all his novels. At the very start, his optimistic view of life was naturally related to his religious beliefs. In his first novel, “Mr. Pickwick is, in effect, the innocent purveyor of his author’s evangelising intentions on behalf of a fundamentally optimistic outlook on life, an outlook which Dickens always tried to

²⁹⁴ “A Brief Biography of Zhang Tianyi” (Zhang Tianyi Zhuanlue 张天翼传略), in Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 3.

²⁹⁵ Dennis Walder, *Dickens and Religion* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1981), 208, 209.

preserve.”²⁹⁶ In most of his fiction, Dickens intends to convey a kind of Christian virtue through the charity shown by positive characters. Charity, “the term means more than the simple human virtue of benevolence, or giving alms to the poor; it implies the more general motive of Christian love, expressed as a love of God and one’s neighbor.”²⁹⁷ Regarding the villains, Dickens tends to reveal their outcomes through divine retribution with distinct religious colour. For instance, the ultimate fate of Sikes in *Oliver Twist*: after striking Nancy to death, he flees London and is pursued relentlessly by the mental image of his victim’s last moment. Dickens describes the process in great detail:

“He went on doggedly; but as he left the town behind him, and plunged into the solitude and darkness of the road, he felt a dread and awe creeping upon him which shook him to the core. [...] If he stopped it did the same. If he ran, it followed-not running too: that would have been a relief: but like a corpse endowed with the mere machinery of life, and borne on one slow melancholy wind that never rose or fell.”²⁹⁸

Dennis Walder points out that: “Dickens is consciously working within a traditional, deeply familiar Christian cosmology in his treatment of evildoers, as he is in his treatment of the good”²⁹⁹ as well as the hints of supernatural dimension in the narrative, such as the thunder that accompanies Monks’s meeting with Mr. Bumbles in *Oliver Twist*, or the dread storm that takes two people’s (Ham Peggotty and James Steerforth) lives in *David Copperfield*.

In addition, apart from the nice rich man, another type of person who also often occurs in Dickens’s fiction is the kind and beautiful young lady, who seemingly derived from Dickens’s deceased sister-in-law Mary Hogarth. This includes a series of characters such as Rose Maylie (*Oliver Twist*); Catherine “Kate” Nickleby (*Nicholas Nickleby*); Little Nell (*The Old Curiosity Shop*); Miss Florence (Floy) Dombey (*Dombey and Son*); Agnes Wickfield (*David Copperfield*); Lucie Manette (*A Tale of Two Cities*) and so forth. Generally, these typical Dickensian women are all

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 45.

²⁹⁸ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 347.

²⁹⁹ Dennis Walder, *Dickens and Religion* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1981), 63.

very similar and perfect in every way. Rose Maylie, for instance, is a young lady

“She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful; [...] above all, the smile, the cheerful, happy smile, were made for Home, and fireside peace and happi-ness.”³⁰⁰

Dickens’s depiction of Rose Maylie is more like an emblem rather than a convincing human being. His yearning memories and dreams of his dead young sister-in-law find full, fierce and complex expression in the female characters within this category. All of them are the projections of Mary Hogarth (Dickens’s sister-in-law),³⁰¹ they share the same features: young and beautiful, offering unqualified and absolute Christian love and representing the purest Christian forgiveness and mercy. Dickens believes that these kinds of characters are realistic, since he recognises Mary as the perfect spiritual ideal. However, these perfect angelic female characters are actually idealised Christians, only based on the experience of a small piece of time which was also Mary Hogarth’s whole life (she died when she was only seventeen in 1837). Her young death simplifies, idealises, and sanctifies her short life, which left Dickens the legacy of a perfect Christian prototype. Of course, not all of them are just projections of Mary, but of Dickens himself, as Michael Slater proposes: “Like *Oliver Twist*, little Nell represents the child-Dickens of his own intense private mythology – a beautiful, delicate, sensitive little creature, threatened, plotted against, betrayed, isolated, but ever strong in faith and love.”³⁰² It might be put in this way, Dickens’s optimistic view of life and Christian faith strengthened each other.

Thus, these two authors’ differing social backgrounds and eras; different levels of popularity and different religious views make Zhang and Dickens have pessimistic and optimistic philo-sophies, respectively.

All in all, Zhang Tianyi integrates Marxism and the reality of the contemporary Chinese social environment, bringing into full play his initiative and subjectivity, selectively appropriating elements from Dickens. Therefore, the initiative and subjectivity displayed in his appropriation of Dickens are the root causes for the

³⁰⁰ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 201, 202.

³⁰¹ Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 128.

³⁰² Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd, 1983), 96.

differences between them.

Chapter IV: Analyses of Five Works of Zhang Tianyi

In order to show some points I made above in Zhang Tianyi's work more specifically, this chapter will offer five case studies, which basically cover all types of Zhang's fiction.

C.T. Hsia divides Zhang Tianyi's oeuvre into three categories: "agitational, ideological and satiric."³⁰³ By considering their contents and focusing on characters, I roughly categorise Zhang's short stories into five modes, the first attempt to categorise his works in this way:

1. The grey life of petty bureaucrats, the bourgeoisie and intellectuals, as represented by "Mr. Jing Ye" (Jingye xiansheng 荊野先生, originally entitled "From Emptiness to Fullness" Cong kongxu dao chongshi 從空虛到充實), "A Loose Love Story" (Xisong de lian'ai gushi 稀鬆的戀愛故事) and "Piggut's Chagrin" (Zhuchangzi de bei'ai 豬腸子的悲哀). The subjects of this group also include the vacillating and vulgar petty intellectuals influenced by the May Fourth Movement, representing their hesitation or cowardice when encountering revolution, represented by "Moving On" (Yihang 移行), "After Walking Out" (Chuzou yihou 出走以後) and "From 1924 to 1934" (Yijiu ersi-sansi 一九二四——三四).
2. The villainy of warlords, landlords, local tyrants, evil gentry, money lenders and capitalists, as represented by "Hatred" (Chouhen 仇恨), "Third Great-Grandfather and Guisheng" (Santaiye yu guisheng 三太爺與桂生), "Cheng Yeheng", "Back and Breasts" (Jibei yu naizi 脊背與奶子), "One Subject Matter" (Yige ticai 一個題材) and "Little Peter" (Xiao Bide 小彼得).
3. Social climbers, who always want to rise their social status but who normally fail, as represented by "Leather Belt" (Pidai 皮帶), "Fatalism and Fortune-telling"

³⁰³ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 214.

(Suming lun yu suanming lun 宿命論与算命論), “Bao Father and Son” (Baoshi fuzi 包氏父子), “Invitation to Dinner” (Qingke 請客), “Friendship” (Youyi 友誼) and “Lu Baotian” (陸寶田).

4. Revolutionary propaganda, as represented by “Twenty-One” (Ershiyi ge 二十一個), “The Bread Line” (Mianbao xian 麵包線), “Road” (Lu 路), “The Last Train” (Zuihou lieche 最後列車), “Dream” (Meng 夢), “The Failure of Lord Snake” (She taiye de shibai 蛇太爺的失敗) and “Sons and Daughters” (Ernümen 兒女們).
5. Drawbacks and disjunction, especially the weaknesses of intellectuals, occur in the anti-Japanese united front during the Sino-Japanese war, as represented by the famous *Three Sketches*, containing “The Work of Mr. Tan Jiu” (Tan Jiu xiansheng de gongzuo 譚九先生的工作), “Mr. Hua Wei” and “New Life”.

Due to the importance of seeing how the various elements of a piece of writing function together as a complete work, I intend to analyse five short stories, one corresponding to each type. All of these chosen works have been largely neglected and have been rarely mentioned by critics in either Chinese or English, but they are important for Zhang Tianyi study as some of them are Zhang’s untypical writings. Also, I intend to produce some new knowledge to break Zhang’s stereotypical image in certain studies. Hence, both specific texts and general characteristics of his writings will be analysed.

Section I: “Moving On”

“Moving On” (1934) can be seen as a representative work of the vacillating petty intellectuals facing a choice between revolutionary or petty bourgeoisie lives. It is a short story that is scarcely mentioned by Chinese critics, and completely ignored in English scholarship, although Zhang Tianyi’s fifth collection of short stories was named after this work.

In essence, it is a narrative that describes a female revolutionary who gives up her communism beliefs when she marries a capitalist. It is written with third-person narrative, but from one character’s perspective. The story begins with a conversation between the protagonist Sang Hua 桑華 and her elder sister. She is rich, pretty and kind. Though she was once poor, she looks noble and shows no traces of her poor origins. Her sister recalls how her parents brought her up to be a delicate, beautiful prepared to marry a rich man and secure the happiness of the whole family. Sang suddenly interrupts her sister and speaks with a stammer: “It was for the sake of the revolution that I got close to him.”³⁰⁴ The sister is astonished as she didn’t know that Sang was a revolutionary. Sang’s opulent lifestyle is markedly different from that of a revolutionary. To unravel this suspense, Sang starts to recall past events. This framework begins the story-within-a-story.

Sang used to walk with Lian Wenkan 連文侃, who was her revolutionary friend. Lian asks Sang to wheedle money from a wealthy industrialist named Li Siyi 李思義. They then go to visit Xiao Hu 小胡, one of their revolutionary comrades, who has tuberculosis and is staying at home. Hu replies that they could not rescue their comrades out of prison and their work can not go on without money. Sang disliked Li, however, she decided to trick him for the money to support revolution.

The next day, Sang and Li spend all afternoon together. Li is a forty-year-old balding man, and confirming his unattractiveness. Sang feels comfort and delight in the park. She thinks that this is the normal life, full of freedom and cheer, far from depressive revolutionary life. This is the first time that Sang vacillates about her

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 149.

revolutionary life.

One night, Sang and Lian are in Hu's place with some other comrades. Hu vomits great amounts of blood, which frightens Sang, causing her to cry. She screams on the way home about the misery of life and death, which is all Hu can expect. He is done, dying of lung disease in a dark room. Sang asks if they still have a chance to attain a free life, but Lian replies that maybe the next generation can achieve that goal. She is sleepless that night, dreaming about the shadow of Hu, about Li's grand house, and that someone in black is tailing her. She cannot bear this anymore, so she writes a note to Lian, saying she needs a vacation for a month. Then she moves to the house of her aunt. At this point, after comparing the dark side of revolution and the extravagant living style of capitalism, Sang has already would like to quit the revolution.

Sang spends time with Li every day, who does everything to make her happy. She really enjoys this time, rather than playing a role to get money like before. Li gives her everything, and she clearly knows he is buying her. Still, Sang considers herself as a soldier of communism. This is just a holiday, designed as a rest. She just would like to enjoy herself a bit longer before returning to the revolution. She has no feelings for Li, only taking advantage of him to make herself happy for a month. She then thinks of her revolutionary friends and experiences complicated emotions. She feels that she has lost her spiritual mainstay. The narrator shows a battle field in Sang's mind, and apparently, Sang towards to the choice of rich life step by step.

Sometimes she thinks of "the other side" and feels scared. She is so ambivalent that she has to drown her worries in drink. She walks around with very conflicted feelings, yet every thought of return makes her suffer. Sang decides to have a talk with Lian and goes to visit him, but he has moved. She goes back and takes two nights writing a long letter to Lian via the old friend. In this letter, she describes her personality and points out she feels separated from revolutionary life, so she quits. Eventually, she accepts Li's proposal and forces herself to say that she loves him, crying. The reminiscence ends, the sister asks Sang if she married Li for money. Sang denies this and orders herself to say that she always loved him.

I have gone into some detail to show how this psychological study progresses from one stage to the next. “Moving On” is story about a change of heart, and portrays the psychological development of a female revolutionary. Most critics pay no attention to this work. A few of them introduce it very superficially, such as the introduction to “Moving On” in *Anthology of Zhang Tianyi* (1993):

“The author vividly creates the typical character of a female intellectual from history, who sinks into a decadent life as a revolutionary...A progressive female intellectual and a underground worker of revolutionary organisation falls into Li Siyi’s arms and becomes the rich wife of a capitalist, because she succumbs to the temptations of material life, such as good cigarettes, wines, candies and luxurious cars.”³⁰⁵

In effect, it is not as simple as this. “Moving On” (Yi hang 移行) means changing paths in life or business. Zhang mainly describes a process of change. His attitude towards this change is neutral, otherwise he would use a word like “sinking” (used by Yu Dafu) to entitle it. So at least, Zhang as an author, has no intention of judging Sang’s change. He gives the right to judge Sang to the readers. This is unique in its category, as Zhang normally has a clear revolutionary attitude, as well as other Left-Wing Writers. He describes the grey life of petty bureaucrats, bourgeoisie and intellectuals in a relatively negative way, like “Mr. Jing Ye”, “A loose love story”, “Piggut’s chagrin” and “From 1924 to 1934”. In these stories, the protagonists are wasting their life or being coward when encountering revolution, which is Zhang opposes. Also, in “Moving On”, Zhang narrates the whole process of how Sang moves from a revolutionary life to a luxurious life with detailed description of her psychology. This means she is not a “flat character”, she has psychological development, she changes. The reason for her change, as Zhang writes, is that she abhors revolutionary life.

The story is divided into four parts. The first one is a conversation between Sang and her sister. Part two is about Sang’s experience of revolution, and answers the question posed by part one: Why was it necessary for her to get close to Li for the

³⁰⁵ Du Lijun 杜黎均, in Han Zuoli and Tian Zengke eds. *Anthology of Zhang Tianyi, Zhang Tianyi mingzuo xinshang* 張天翼名作欣賞 (Beijing: Zhongguo heping chubanshe, 1993), 62.

sake of the revolution? Part three is the process of changing her mind. Part four shows her befuddled life again and prefigures her uncertain finality. Apparently, this story runs through by the protagonist Sang Hua, all narrative parts connect with her and her memories. This is a typical story that to show Zhang's "character comes first" literary idea.

Sang Hua is a pretty, rich, arrogant, and educated woman. The furnishings in her villa are quite luxurious; she can even afford to hire a traditional opera circle for entertaining in the summer. She pays particular attention to her makeup and elegant posture in daily life, so she usually looks in the mirror to adjust herself. In the eyes of others, Sang is a perfect woman. As a matter of fact, Sang is not just a person who is being gazed at, but is also an observer. She sees her sister and finds that "she is weird, looking neither like a woman nor a man. Her face is just a normal face, no makeup at all. Her hair is short, and she stands up straight, like a man."³⁰⁶ Of course Sang denigrates her sister's lifestyle, as her sister has no image-consciousness. More importantly, apart from Sang watching parts of her body (like her hands, nails, etc.) directly several times, she looks in the mirror to see herself three times in the whole story. She does this twice in part one, adjusting her posture to make it more graceful and ensure that her make up is still fine. Sang is therefore a kind of artist who creates art by using her own body. She uses the mirror to watch, recognise and appreciate herself as a piece of artwork. The mirror is an important instrument here, used to represent Sang's double identity as artist and artwork.

There are multiple metaphors of the mirror. First of all, Sang identifies herself as a work of art through the mirror; this is a kind of materialisation of herself. An artwork has a relevant price in the market, the buyer appraises its artistic value depending on its beauty, expense and rarity. She makes herself as beautiful as possible, which is what she cares most about. Thus, she constantly looks herself in the mirror to make sure that she is selling herself at the best price. The mirror is a showcase or exhibition stand for Sang. The artist pretends to be a customer and makes the commodity catering for the customers more specifically, the men. The female relies on the male, and this traditional psychological dependence still accompanies well-

³⁰⁶ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Moving on" (Yihang 移行), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.2 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 146.

educated female intellectuals in the post-May Fourth movement period. Secondly, the mirror is also a magnifying glass. In part three, Sang lives in her aunt's house for a one-month vacation. Li makes a proposal and she hesitates.

"She goes to the bath room and washes her face carefully. The part of her body above her breasts is reflected in the mirror. [...] After two or three minutes, she tightens her nightgown, shows the curve of her breasts and waist. Then she exercises again.

Sang becomes sentimental when she looks at her good figure and pleasing gestures in the mirror. She feels melancholy for the beautiful woman in the mirror.

'Why? Why?' She asks herself with sorrow.

Such beautiful shoulders, with full breasts, and long legs. It is not too much to say 'so beautiful' for such a good shape, let alone her fair skin.

However, she has to sacrifice such a pretty body into a dark world, gnawed by tuberculosis mould, tortured by dangerous actions, and finally to be foisted into torture devices. 'Why? Why?'

Her eyes go dim and she leans against the wall."³⁰⁷

Once again, Sang sees herself from a customer's perspective through the mirror. All of the merits of her body present themselves in tremendous detail. Her body is so perfect, but she cannot see this clearly without the mirror. The mirror magnifies her physical beauty, which makes her even feel sorry for the beautiful woman in the mirror. Why should she lose such beauty to the revolutionary life, which is like hell? This, she feels, is like committing a crime against herself, equal to committing suicide. It is this moment that pushes Sang to decide to quit the revolution. She cannot bear to kill such a flawless body, as reflected in the magnifying glass.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 171.

Thirdly, the mirror symbolises the fragility of Sang's beauty, for no human can overcome the great power of time. In addition, it also echoes Sang and Li's fragile marriage. As her sister says, the price of rubber is falling and Li is about to go bankrupt. What will happen when Li becomes a poor man? Obviously Sang will leave him, since she married him for the sake of money. The cornerstone of their marriage is Li's wealth. Once Li loses his fortune, Sang will sell herself again, to another rich man. Such a fragile artwork needs a large amount of money to maintain its beauty, which is why she will always have to marry a wealthy man.

When Sang and her sister talk about the reason why she and Li got close, Sang answers that it was because of revolution. This astonishes the sister, since Sang doesn't seem suited for revolution completely. But Sang really was a revolutionary: "She stands up solemnly and doesn't forget to show a nice gesture; this has become her instinct."³⁰⁸ This sentence shows a contradiction in Sang's mind, which is a core conflict throughout the following text. At first, although Sang has quit the revolution, she still has a solemn attitude toward it, which means she approves of the values of revolution. Thus, being beautiful is her instinct. She is just like a vulnerable butterfly, who cannot live in a revolutionary circumstance, without those extravagant items. However, Sang was not a solid revolutionary at the very start. She joined the revolution just for fun, following the fashion. So when she surprises her sister, she is pleased, for her sister was not expecting that she was once a Communist. Then Sang walks to the window, watches the moon and begins to recall her revolutionary experience.

The moon, in the narrator's description, is like a slice of orange. The image of the orange appears three times in this story. The first two times are at the end of part one. The description serves to link part one and part two, as part two starts from a night under the moonlight of a moon that is also like a piece of orange. What's more is that an orange is a kind of fruit which has a taste mixing sweet and sour. It indicates that neither a luxurious life nor a revolutionary life is right for Sang. First, Sang doesn't like Li at all. We can deduce this from her attitude towards Li, which is

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 149.

mainly due to his ugly appearance: "Once she thinks of Li Siyi, she feels like drinking a spoon of castor oil."³⁰⁹ When she accepts Li's proposal at the end of part three, she has to force herself to say: "I love him, I love him. Indeed, I love him."³¹⁰ And when they are kissing, "her chin and mouth are touched by his projecting teeth, which are cold."³¹¹ Apparently, what is cold is not just Li's teeth but also his money. The luxurious life is like an orange: the sweet part is the extravagant lifestyle, and the sour part is Li. Sang is disgusted with Li; she fancies "if Wenkan could replace Li Siyi, that would be great."³¹² Hence, Lian Wenkan is the sweet part of the revolutionary life, and the correspondingly sour part is the pain of revolution. These two modes of life are ultimately contradictory, but Sang weighs the pros and cons and finally chooses the former.

In part two, the image of the orange appears once again. It is after Sang spends an afternoon together with Li and has lots of fun. This enjoyment is followed by a description of the moon that night: "The moon has got fat, looks like more than half of an orange."³¹³ This is followed by the scene of Xiao Hu vomiting blood, which terrifies Sang. The fatter moon symbolises that the conflict between advantage and disadvantage is starker in the context of revolutionary life. Sang feels suffocated by this kind of life; she cannot live it, despite her fondness for Lian. Thus, she finally makes the decision to move from revolution to enjoyment, from Lian to Li.

Sang makes this choice in life as she detests revolution more than she dislikes Li. Indeed, Zhang does describe revolution in a quite negative way. At the beginning of part two, Sang and Lian walk together under the moonlight: "His hands are cold with sweat. He holds her hand, and she feels like she is being chained by an iron ring. Their shadows reflect into one on the ground, following them by nailing onto their feet."³¹⁴ Undoubtedly, the four key words "cold", "chain", "iron ring" and "nail" allude to Sang's impression of revolution. From Sang's perspective, the first feature of revolution is lack of freedom. She cannot even wear makeup, like a worker. The second one is link to illness, filth and poverty, as detailed by the description of Xiao

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 173.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 176.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid., 173.

³¹³ Ibid., 158.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 150.

Hu's tuberculosis. Even thinking of Hu's serious illness makes her sick. Hu's home, as the narrator depicts it, is like a living hell. "It throws off an offensive smell, the tables and chairs are covered by Hu's bloody sputum."³¹⁵ She has to cover her mouth and nose with handkerchief and of course, Hu has no money for a cure, all he can do is wait to die. Sang goes to Hu's home twice, and between them she goes on dates with Li. They go to the park and the music hall, have dinner, and drink alcohol. In the park, she enjoys the smells. She notes that the sightseers are so relaxed; some kids are even rolling and playing in the meadow. All these things make Sang feel comfortable and free. This is a world that is so completely different from Hu's home that represents the revolutionary sphere. Such a deliberate arrangement creates a sharp contrast, establishing both a heaven and a hell. Therefore, Sang feels lost when their date ends, as she dates Li for a reason - to raise funds for revolution, rather than seeking pure enjoyment. This date is temporary and illusory; she is being an actress, participating in a drama. She has to go back to the revolutionary world soon after, more specifically, go back to Hu's home. The second time Sang goes to visit Hu, he is dying and spitting blood. The place is full of his blood and stinking liquid medicine. Sang cries and escapes from this place, which signifies she would like to escape from revolution.

In fact, Sang is provided every reason to change her mind. The narrator rethinks the meaning of life and revolution through her words after she breaks down at Hu's home. She queries: what is the meaning of Hu's life? His life is full of pain, disaster, disease and death. Now his life is done and he experiences no reward except empty faith. There are so many people like Hu, suffering all of their lives and dying painfully in the dark. Sang questions the purpose of this and the meaning of their lives beyond suffering. Sang concludes that their life is meaningless, just secretly hidden underground, without freedom and gaining nothing. For Sang, this is not the only choice of life; she wants another choice, to live in peace and security.

Lian asks her: how can they live in peace and security during such troubled times? They cannot, which is why they have to join the revolution. However, Lian is only partly right; they cannot, but Sang can. For she is a beautiful woman who can marry

³¹⁵ Ibid., 152.

a rich man to be rid of this fate. Now she happens to have an opportunity waiting for her, to help her keep away from a painful life like Hu even though this might only be a temporary option, as we know from the end of the story. Ironically, this chance is offered by revolution. It is the revolution that pushes Sang to betrayal, as she says in part three: "It's not my fault, it's not my fault. They abandoned me."³¹⁶

In addition, Sang's thoughts about revolution is reasonable. What, after all, is the revolution for? No doubt, for a better life and freedom. But life is short and revolution costs a lot. She asks Lian: "Do we have chance to live freely in this life?" Lian answers: "If we cannot, the next generation will."³¹⁷ They then fall silent. She questions why the next generation should take advantage of their generation. She has no responsibility to sacrifice her freedom to help others to gain theirs. Furthermore, being a revolutionary and an underground worker, what she stands to lose is more than one kind of freedom. She is not just monitored by the enemy, but also by her comrades. This fear is seen repeatedly in visions and dream at the end of part two, when she sees some strong men wearing black who are waiting and tailing her. Thus, she loses two types of freedom in revolution. That is why she always feels suffocated in her revolutionary experience and thus she quits to pursue what she believes is freedom. She has the right to be free and makes her own choice; this is also the May Fourth spirit. Indeed, the narrator nearly leaves no other choice for Sang. In her dream, she sees three things in sequence: "She sees Hu is vomiting blood; then she feels like staying in Li's house. Later, she finds a black shadow is tailing her."³¹⁸ Obviously, getting close to Li is the best choice for her at that moment, which is stuck between worlds and still enjoying relative freedoms, as compared with the others.

Sang is selfish, but what she does is also reasonable. Her quitting is all about choice: either revolution or marriage to a wealthy man to lead a better life. But the former is too slow (she might even not see the triumph in her lifetime) and may fail. The latter is safer and faster, although she still has to abandon another type of freedom. Sang sells herself for her material comforts. Although she is not perfectly

³¹⁶ Ibid., 174.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 161.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 163.

happy in this marriage, it is not actively bad either. Whatever happens, this is Sang's own choice. She has the right to choose and no one should blame her for that. Sang chooses Li for a good reason; other people have to join the revolution because they don't have such a choice. Her former revolutionary friends consider Sang a traitor who sinks into depravity. This is unfair, as they blame her for what they perceive to be her betrayal of faith. As a matter of fact, what angers them really is that Sang had the choice that they did not. They just envy her. Thus, Sang's quitting the revolutionary scene is just a choice in life, which should not be blamed from an ideological perspective. This is different from the rest of stories in this category like "Piggy's chagrin", "From 1924 to 1934", in these stories, the narrator depicts the actions of protagonists in an obvious negative way. Accordingly, "Moving on" is more like "After Walking out", the latter one is also a choice of life: either leave her husband for the sake of the workers in his factory or go back for her extravagant life. All her parents and uncle ask her to choose to go back because of money, even her uncle once advocated revolution, and he said, he was only following the fashion. That is the meaning of revolution to him (and many intellectuals), just a kind of fashion. Maybe it is the same to Sanghua.

As Sang writes in her letter to Lian, the fundamental cause of her quitting the revolution is her disposition, which is not compatible with the revolutionary life. She believes that life is too short and just wants to be free and happy. We can surmise that the narrator's attitude towards her philosophy of life is negative, from the description of her marriage with Li. The narrator predicts Li will be bankrupt soon and depicts their marriage in a rather negative way. At least in this story, however, there is no apparent hint to indicate that the narrator recommends Sang choosing the path of revolution. The revolution as described here is also awful to behold. The narrator represents all of the dreadful aspects of revolution. It seems that the two options offered to Sang are both likely to lead to tragedy. That is, the author satirises both revolution and Epicureanism. Zhang, as a member of the League of Left-Wing Writers, would be expected to make his attitude towards revolution more explicit and positive, but he didn't in this story. This is rare in the works of Left-Wing writers but is a distinctive feature of Zhang's craft. Zhang is an author, as C.T.Hsia argues:

"who refuses to complement his realistic observation of society with the required

dialectic of Communist optimism. And yet in this refusal to discriminate between the good and bad, the hopeful and decadent, lies precisely our author's satiric strength."³¹⁹

He is good at finding drawbacks and exposes very frankly what other Left-Wing writers could not see or would not write. That is why he wrote "Mr. Hua Wei", stirring up a fierce debate. This is what Zhang differs from his contemporary Left-Wing writers and this can be seemed as his unique contribution to modern Chinese literature.

³¹⁹ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 215.

Section II: “Cheng Yeheng”

“Cheng Yeheng” 成業恒 has been selected as a text representative of Zhang’s type two mode, namely, depicting of the villainy of local tyrants. It was first published in *Oriental Magazine* (Dongfang zazhi 東方雜誌 vol.30, no.5) on March 1st, 1933. It is a collection of documents without a single narrator. Cheng Yeheng is a petty bureaucrat of the KMT, so this story relates also to mode one and may be understood as a combination of those two modes.

It starts with a preface explaining that someone gave the following material to the author, who only changed the names. This artistic method indicates that the narrator is only a medium telling the true story, which establishes a false but palpable authenticity within the tale. The preface is followed by a letter written from Cheng Yeheng to his friend. Cheng, the first person narrator in this section, says that he had gone to meet Mr. Pan for a job opportunity. Pan not only refused to help but also spread rumors that Cheng is suspected of being a Communist. This might be because Cheng was in prison for two years. But Cheng believes that his friend, the recipient of the letter, knows him well. It was a conspiracy of local tyrants who trapped him and brought a false charge against him as a Communist. Here he says: “All of my properties have been ruined by Communists and my house was burned. I have an intense hatred for Communists, how could I be a Communist?”³²⁰ He then says that he has collected several documents related to his contribution to anti-Communists, and asks his friend to forward them to Pan and put in a good word for him. After that, all of the narratives below are documents attached to the letter.

Document one is a record of Cheng’s contribution to suppressing bandits (Communists) from a weekly magazine. The Communists came to Beixiang 北鄉, ruined Cheng’s house and his father disappeared. He was full of enthusiasm for killing Communists. During a KMT meeting, he proposes that all committee members should accompany the troops to help encircle the bandits. A man named

³²⁰ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Cheng Yeheng” (成業恒), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 397.

Liu Ming 劉明 was captured. Cheng was asked by a battalion commander to conduct the interrogation. Then he found out that the Communist was his classmate from primary school, so he couldn't proceed.

Cheng stated clearly that he hated both the village tyrant and Communists, as the local tyrant bullied his family and Communists destroyed his home. The commander wanted to make sure that Cheng hated Communists more, so he offered Cheng the job of executing Liu Ming by his own hand. Cheng finally did shoot him and felt satisfied and joyful, although the commander still mocked Cheng.³²¹

Document two is a major news item extracted from a local newspaper. The heading reads: "County Committee members Cheng Yeheng and Wang Botao are our most loyal KMT comrades".³²² Cheng had accompanied the army to attack the bandits and killed dozens by his own hand. He also opposes local tyrants and thus triggers their hostility. They brought local militia to arrest Cheng and Wang. "Our Party branch and its affiliates are pretty angry about this illegal arrest. We request that Cheng and Wang are released immediately and get an apology officially. Also, we ask the Provincial Party Department to replace our County Magistrate".³²³

Document three is an announcement in another newspaper.

Yesterday a savage gang burst into our press, introduced themselves as military and government officers. They claimed that we were covering up Communists like Cheng Yeheng so they destroyed everything in our publishing house. Our next publications will be delayed.³²⁴

Document four is an incomplete diary written in prison by Cheng in random orders. There were five Communists in the prison; one of them was also arrested by Cheng from the village. They accused Cheng of being a local tyrant. Of course, Cheng

³²¹ Ibid., 405.

³²² Ibid., 410

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

denied and said: “How can I be a local tyrant? I am here because of a local tyrant.”³²⁵ But they wouldn’t believe him. Cheng sighed with emotion: “They just keep on saying that I am a local tyrant! Communists destroyed my home and someone accused me of being a Communist. The local tyrants put me into jail and someone accused me of being a local tyrant. Why am I so unlucky? What did I do in my pre-life?”³²⁶

The Communists insisted Cheng was a spy and beat him. He repeatedly tried to explain but this did not work. In a terrifying scene, the prisoners were executed one by one. Cheng remained scared. He had visions and bad dreams day and night. The Communists kept threatening Cheng and pushed him to the verge of collapse. “The local tyrant framed me for being a Communist. The Communists claimed me as a local tyrant and want to chop off my head. I am pressed from both sides! Where am I to go?”³²⁷ He had to ask the man in charge to transfer him.

From the annotation, we know that Cheng had stayed in the correction centre for a whole year before finally leaving detention. Cheng was sandwiched between Communists and local tyrants for two years. Now he cannot return to his ruined home town. He must choose a job for living, so he tried to ask someone for a job opportunity. The person he asks is Mr. Pan, the one mentioned at the very beginning of the story.

It might be safe to say that the narrative strategy of “Cheng Yeheng” is the most delicate and intricate amongst all of Zhang Tianyi’s fiction. It is the only one which combines letters, records, news, notifications and a diary together into a narrative; even the annotations also involve narration. The diversity of the narrative modes is not extravagant, but serves the content well. Also, it is a good example to support Zhang’s “character comes first” literary idea which mentioned in Chapter II section I. All these documents in the story are scattered, the protagonist is the only connection between them.

³²⁵ Ibid., 412.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid., 425.

The preface, as mentioned above, is an artistic technique, that not only enhances the sense of the story's authenticity, but also legitimises the strange combination of multiple materials. They are just a series of random materials that "someone" gave the author. The author did nothing but change the names.

From the letter, we learn that all these materials bound together for a reason. As in the letter, Cheng Yeheng sent these documents to his friend Ji Lunzhi 季倫志 to prove his identity and asked Ji's help to transfer them to Mr. Pan to help get Cheng a job. Cheng introduced each document he attached, and explained why he presented these documents. This makes the following documents connect with each other more tightly. The four documents (record, newspaper article, notification, diary) attached with the letter prove that Cheng is not a Communist but a loyal KMT member. Thus, this letter makes the strange form of the story more reasonable. From the language style of this letter, we can also see that Cheng is an educated person, an intellectual. This is also the core element of mode one.

Furthermore, the annotations of the story are also part of the narrative. Document four is named "Notes written in prison", then follows with an annotation: "What is called notes are actually a diary, but this was just a copy from the original materials without any change. And this diary only marks with date, no specific months, just like the original texts. – Tianyi (the narrator)"³²⁸. Using the author's name as narrator is a way of appealing to authenticity. Also, this annotation explains the disorder of time in document four, which consists of many fragmentations in effect, like many of Zhang's other short stories. In the end, there are two notes marked with 3rd and 4th successively, followed by an annotation: "The author told me that these two pieces were written a year apart, those notes among them are still in correction center, which will be supplemented if I get a chance in the future."³²⁹ This annotation gives a strong reason to explain the abrupt nature of the narration and also makes the story more convincing. To maximise the effect, the narrator even deliberately adds an annotation to correct apparently wrongly written characters. He writes "a smell of Jiangxi 江西 fermented soya beans"³³⁰ with the following annotation: "it was 'drum'

³²⁸ Ibid., 411.

³²⁹ Ibid., 427.

³³⁰ Ibid., 414.

(Gu 鼓 spelled like Chi 豉 in Chinese) on the original text, it seems a wrongly written character.”³³¹ By virtue of this trick, the narrator explains the incongruity of the pattern of collected fragments in this story, which is a common mode in Zhang’s fiction. Therefore, the story achieves its effect through Zhang’s skillful arrangement of narratives.

Furthermore, we know that Cheng had been arrested and put in jail for two years from the letter. The reason is that a local tyrant brought a false charge against him, accusing him of being a Communist. Cheng feels angry that Communists destroyed his home and property, there is no single reason on earth that he would become a Communist. Cheng once confiscated the property of a local tyrant, Li Tianjun (this is a plot in “Counter-attack”, a kind of prequel to “Cheng Yeheng”), and thus offending him, which in turn prompted Li Tianjun to frame Cheng. Cheng said: “It doesn’t matter if Mr. Pan can help me get a job, but the suspicion of me being a Communist must be withdrawn.”³³² It is clear that Cheng hates Communists and his top priority is to eradicate this stain upon his reputation. We can see from the following paragraph that he owes rent and needs money very urgently. Even under this dire circumstance, he still puts the clearing of his reputation first. This setting achieves a deeply satirical effect. One of the most pathetic things is to become someone or something you have always hate and Cheng even bears this name in jail for two years.

The first document marks Cheng’s contribution to the suppression of bandits. As he said in the letter, this report was written by himself, published in a local County weekly publication to show his loyalty to the KMT. Cheng’s family was ruined by Communists. He emphasises repeatedly that he must get revenge. But when the chance came, he hesitated. The Communist they captured happened to be Cheng’s old classmate. Cheng was too weak to hurt such an acquaintance. Cheng refused to deal with this case immediately, which arouses the commander’s distrust. “‘Why?’ Commander Kang opened his eyes wide.”³³³ The commander is astonished because Cheng’s words are not matched by his deeds. Cheng expressed deep hatred

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid., 398.

³³³ Ibid., 401.

towards Communists, but when he faced a real Communist, he just quit, which is an odd response. When we relate this to Cheng's total actions, it is easy to ask questions like this: Why did all of the committee members go back, except Cheng? Does he really abhor Communists? Or does he just want to get a chance to transmit a message regarding the movement of the KMT army? Maybe he is a spy working for the Communists, which is why he proposed that committee members should follow the army. From this moment, the commander starts to suspect that Cheng is actually a spy.

Liu Ming, Cheng's classmate in primary school, the communist, is barely described directly. He speaks only two sentences when interrogated, one of them being: "I have an uncle, he is..." "Liu Zi'an."³³⁴ Actually, the narrator presents Liu Ming in a very positive way. He was brought there at "4 or 5 pm, it is dark. The guy is standing near the door and his shape is reflected clearly by the white snow outside. The candlelight is shaking and illuminating his face into red. He has a medium figure and wide shoulders..."³³⁵ If we consider the symbolic meaning of these colors, it is easy to conclude that "dark" alludes to the social circumstance under the control of KMT. The "white snow" reflects the contour of his face, which relates "white" to Liu Ming, means holy and pure. The reference to "red" symbolises his political tendency. The reader can also infer that the force of Communists is weak at the moment, just like the candlelight. From these symbolic significances, we can see Zhang wrote on the side of Communists.

When Liu Ming confessed that his uncle was a Communist, the commander asked Cheng: "'Do you know a guy named Liu Zi'an? Liu Ming has informed on him.' After a while, 'Why you didn't tell me first?'"³³⁶ Evidently, the commander suspects Cheng increasingly. Cheng has known one Communist (Liu Ming), and it seems that he knows Liu Zi'an too. If Cheng knows so many Communists, why didn't he say anything from the very start? Then the commander started walking around, smoking and pondering the meaning of Cheng's sudden change. This had been the second change of Cheng's opinions in one day. At first, Cheng wanted the commander to

³³⁴ Ibid., 402.

³³⁵ Ibid., 401.

³³⁶ Ibid., 402.

ignore Liu Zi'an, but then he wanted to arrest Liu abruptly. To a suspicious man, it can be explained like this: Cheng would like to protect Liu Zi'an at first, but soon he realised that he might be suspected by the commander, so Cheng decided to abandon Liu to protect himself. After careful consideration, the commander determined that whatever Liu is, he must catch him.

Of course, Liu Zi'an was by no means a Communist. Liu Ming wanted to use a proxy to eliminate a rival. In fact, Cheng hated Liu Zi'an too, since his family had once been oppressed by Liu Zi'an for lending money. But for the commander, whatever their identities, both Liu Ming and Liu Zi'an increased his suspicion that Cheng might be a Communist.

After releasing Liu Zi'an, Cheng and the commander were drinking. The commander asked Cheng whether he hates the local tyrant. Cheng admitted that he did. Then the commander asked: "But you hate Communists more, don't you?"³³⁷ Cheng didn't answer directly, he replied: "The communists ruined my home and destroyed my house: What do you think?"³³⁸ Obviously, the commander was not satisfied with this ambiguous answer, although he said: "You are faithful."³³⁹ He tried to ascertain whether or not Cheng was a spy, and thus the commander ordered Cheng to conduct the execution of Liu Ming. From that moment to the day of execution, the commander laughed four times. The first time was when Cheng agreed at once, the commander could not believe him and asked: "'Really?' he smiled, 'Liu is your friend.'"³⁴⁰ This laughter meant he likes his idea, which put Cheng in a dilemma. Since he had assumed that Cheng was a Communist, killing Liu would pain Cheng, and he might expose himself as a Communist. The second time was when they shook hands for this deal; the commander smiled again, expecting a dramatic show for the next day as he believed that Cheng would change his mind again. The third occasion was when Cheng hesitated the next day, as the commander had expected. Also, this had been Cheng's third change of mind, so of course the commander's suspicion increased once again. The fourth laugh came when the commander taught Cheng how to use a gun, for Cheng had used this as an excuse to refuse to conduct

³³⁷ Ibid., 404.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

the execution. The commander said: "Come on, this time you don't have any excuse, hahaha."³⁴¹ He laughed because he thought that he had driven Cheng to the edge. When Cheng finally finished the execution, the commander asked him: "Comrade Cheng, did you tremble when you shot? Let's have a drink to help lull your nerves."³⁴² Judging by this, even though Cheng had killed Liu Ming, the commander still suspects his identity. This crisis of identity haunts Cheng throughout the whole story.

Cheng's identity crisis achieves its climax in document four. When he was in jail, the prisoners consisted of peasants and Communists, some of them were arrested by Cheng himself. To these prisoners, Cheng was a local tyrant or a spy working for the KMT to keep watch on them. Cheng fell into a hostile and fearful circumstance.

A Communist named Wu Nan was more kind and gentle than the others in the jail. He asked Cheng the reason he was there and showed sympathy for Cheng's dilemma. During this process, Wu Nan used his right hand to wipe his face twice, and "watched his right hand if there was something dirty on it".³⁴³ Wu is definitely leftist in his political choice. In contrast, Cheng represents the "right" and is filthy to Wu. Wu regarded Cheng as a pathetic person, who was rebuffed by both sides. Even though Wu was the kindest of these Communists, he was just a spectator, mocking Cheng's plight and offering no substantial help. This alludes to a thorough refusal from the Communists.

The Communists refused Cheng and vice versa. Cheng didn't even regard Communists as human beings: "They were born to be Communists; they are ignorant, amounting to beasts. How can I prosecute a dog for biting me?"³⁴⁴ The conflict between Cheng and the Communists is the main idea of document four. They all wanted to kill each other. But Cheng was relatively weak. The Communists kept threatening him, especially when their troops were marching towards them. "When our troops arrive here, we will kill you first!"³⁴⁵ They even debated the method

³⁴¹ Ibid., 405.

³⁴² Ibid., 406.

³⁴³ Ibid., 413.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 414.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 422.

for killing Cheng – shooting or beheading him. This made Cheng have terrible illusions of being executed. “It is gloomy above and dark below. The Army of Communists rush in like mad dogs. They all have red eyes, then catch Cheng Yeheng.”³⁴⁶ For Cheng, the Communists are bandits indeed. The representative colour of Communists is red, which becomes emblematic of madness for Cheng. When they heard the sound of gunfire, Cheng was on the verge of breakdown. He felt like his “head, lung and belly are going to explode...the whole body is burning like wax on fire, melts into water gradually.”³⁴⁷ Cheng has no idea why he has come to this end. He said he had two kinds of enemy: local tyrants and Communists, and he was stuck in the middle. As a matter of fact, Cheng has three enemies: the KMT, Communists and local tyrants. It was the KMT who put him into jail and the KMT is the real cause of his suffering.

In fact, the commander is symbolic of KMT leadership; they have only one enemy, namely the Communists. The commander is oversensitive and cunning, always suspecting that Cheng is a spy working for the Communists and using tricks. He is suspicious of Cheng until the very end. This is also a foreshadowing of Cheng’s imprisonment. Thus, it is not just the local tyrants who put Cheng into jail, the prime initiator is the KMT leadership.

Cheng is representative of the petty bureaucrats of the KMT, as well as educated intellectuals. Unlike those vacillating, petty intellectuals in mode one like “Moving on” and “After Walking out” who waver between revolution and individualism, Cheng does abhor Communists bitterly. But unfortunately, he is not only framed by a local tyrant or the KMT, but actually framed by the author. There are so many coincidences that make Cheng change his mind repeatedly. No wonder the commander suspects him all the time. Firstly, he happens to be Liu Ming’s classmate, who is an undoubted Communist. Secondly, he also knows Liu Zi’an, suspected of being a Communist, and he tries to protect Liu Zi’an the first time. Thirdly, Cheng is a weak person but also a braggart who likes to boast first and then chickens out. All these factors combine to make Cheng highly suspicious in the eyes of the commander.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 423.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 424.

Ironically, Cheng knows little about Communists. In the battle with bandits, Cheng and a platoon disguise themselves as an army of Communists by displaying a piece of red cloth, and Cheng believes that they are so like the Red Army. Also, when Cheng is caught in jail, the head of the prison tells Cheng to write an article about Communists to help him get out. Cheng has to ask the other prisoners who are real Communists some basic questions about Communism, such as “What was Marx’s nationality?”³⁴⁸

It is obvious that Cheng might be the last person to join the Communists. But he is placed in an embarrassing position between the local tyrant, the Communists and the KMT members. Hence, Cheng is subject to a crisis of identity. He is a local tyrant to those real Communists, but also a communist to the KMT. There is a tension between these contrasting ideological labels, and this tension forms the tragedy and dilemma of the torn character. Cheng sinks into a dreadful dilemma, sandwiched between Communists and local tyrants. He has struggled and struggled to define himself, just like his own saying: “The local tyrant framed me for being a Communist. The Communists claimed I am a local tyrant and want to chop off my head. I am pressed from both sides! Where am I to go?”³⁴⁹ Sadly, he has nowhere to go; Cheng is homeless, both physically and mentally, as he said when he accompanied a platoon to the mountain. “Where is my home now? Now I...”³⁵⁰ This identity crisis is unique in this category, as most of these stories are dichotomic. Such as “Third Great-Grandfather and Guisheng”, the mode is rather simple, just the Third Great-Grandfather frames up Guisheng and his sister, then buries them alive. Their identities are still, no tension, just landlords oppress peasants. However, the identity crisis of Cheng makes his tragedy more ironic, which thus makes this story stand out of mode two.

Cheng’s dilemma is typical. He represents a group of people who were petty, lower-class bureaucrats in the KMT. They hate Communists blindly but are also distrusted by the high-level leadership within the KMT. There is no scope for their happiness,

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 421.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 425.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 408.

ambitions or their future. Failure is common, with results in eviction, death, collapse of the family and imprisonment. In the end of “Cheng Yeheng”, the problem remains unsolved. There is no hint that any of the three sides are likely to accept Cheng. It is a total tragedy.

“Cheng Yeheng” is a unique short story that distinguishes itself from others by its subtle narrative mode and brilliant plot setting. The main concept is to present a typical dilemma of some petty bureaucrat in the KMT, who has lost his identity and so has nowhere to go. Furthermore, the vicious local tyrant is not the only villain, but also the KMT. The KMT collaborates with the local tyrant to ruin Cheng’s life. Zhang offers no solution to such a tragedy, but only shows his deep sympathy.

Section III: “Fatalism and Fortune-telling”

The social climber is a common stereotype throughout Zhang Tianyi's fiction, from “Leather Belt” (1931) to “Lu Baotian” (1937). Social climbers are a group of people generated by violent social transformation of modern society. Accompanied by the collapse of the Qing dynasty, many social classes disintegrated and new classes were born. In the late dynastic age, the imperial examinations gave opportunities to intellectuals, allowing them to improve their social status. But this path was closed from 1905. To those intellectuals, who received an old-fashioned education to some extent, but had not enough money to go to university for higher education or go abroad, they had to enter society and earn their living.³⁵¹ Many of them came from the countryside; they were not reconciled to remaining peasants since they were literate and so they entered the cities as humble civil servants or small-time clerks, ceaselessly struggling to maintain their position and get a promotion. Most of these people remained on the bottom rungs of society; they were a new sort of social climber in Republican China.³⁵² These characters in Zhang's works are well portrayed, may be because Zhang once worked as a civil servant of KMT government himself. The social class of the social climbers is embarrassing, they sandwich between petty bourgeoisie and peasant. The description of this group of people extended the scope of Left-Wing literature's topic, this is also Zhang's contribution.

Technically, these people are intellectuals, although they have not received a modern education in Zhang's fiction. They struggle to live in the cities and have to use various methods to get promoted, such as nepotism (in “Leather Belt”) or attaching themselves to dignitaries (in “Friendship”, “Invitation to Dinner” and “Lu Baotian”). They have abandoned the sense of righteousness but only aim to earn money and get promoted. The social climbing struggles between the middle and lower classes in the society but these people do not live a better life than workers and peasants. This group of people, in spite of their considerable amount in their era, have been relatively neglected by Left-Wing writers other than Zhang. Portraits of social

³⁵¹ Xueqing Xu 徐學清, “The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School” in Kirk A. Denton and Michel Hockx eds. *Literary Societies of Republican China* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 56.

³⁵² Du Yuanming 杜元明, *The papers on Zhang Tianyi's works (Zhang Tianyi xiaoshuo lungao 張天翼小說論稿)* (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1985), 39.

climbers are abundant in his works. The most famous one amongst these is Lao Bao (老包) in “Bao Father and Son”, which has been analysed many times (over 15 relevant articles on China Academic Journals Database). To avoid repetition, this section will deal with another work in this category, entitled “Fatalism and Fortune-telling” (Suming lun yu suanming lun 宿命論與算命論). It was first published in *Les Contemporains* (Xiandai 現代 vol.1,no.1) on May 1st,1932.

“Fatalism and Fortune-telling” is a story of a secret agent, Shu Keji 舒可濟, who informs against his old classmate and friend. The story begins at a social occasion. Shu Keji goes to a colleague’s house for a lunch to celebrate his colleague’s promotion. An old man is discussing astrology and so Shu asks about his fate. The old man puts his hand to Shu’s forehead and says good fortune is in store for him this year. Shu doesn’t believe it for there are no signs for his upcoming good luck. The fortuneteller says “human effort is the decisive factor, although one has good luck. It is all about chance, with the help of good luck, grab the chance and you will succeed. But if you are unlucky, no chance would help.”³⁵³

After lunch, on his way home, Shu shivers at the thought of the small, dark, dismal room awaiting him. He wants to improve the quality of his life desperately. The spring has come, which makes Shu feel lazy and want to sleep. This reminds him that he needs a woman; he also needs delicious food, a raincoat, and an electric iron. He considers these to be the basic necessities of a normal life and he can acquire them simply by getting a promotion. If he is lucky and gets a chance, he would like to grab it.

Suddenly he encounters an approaching couple. He recognizes the woman as Miss Ma, and the man is his old classmate, who was supposed to be executed in Beijing long time ago. Later, Shu is pleased to tell Miss Ma the history of his old friend. His true name was Lin Kejun 林克俊 and his nickname was “flat mouth”. He was politically active the year he was about to graduate from high school, and Shu was his blind follower. Actually they were best friends, spending day and night together.

³⁵³ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Fatalism and Fortune-telling” (Suming lun yu suanming lun 宿命論與算命論), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.1 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 254.

Lin helped Shu a lot, in every aspect. Then Shu goes to the high school where Lin is teaching. They almost embrace with joy. Lin was arrested in Beijing, but was released on bail after a month. They go to the house of Lin's uncle together. On the way, Shu learns that Lin already has a fiancée teaching in Southeast Asia. Shu is reluctant to talk about his career as he is a secret agent. After dinner, Shu asks Lin if he is still doing "that", which means revolution. Lin denies and says he is just living a normal life. Shu is jealous of Lin's normal life, which is happier than his own.

Shu feels more uncomfortable, with feelings of suffocation when he returns home. He thinks about their life as students. Now Lin has a better life, he even has a woman, but Shu gets nothing. Shu considers Lin might still be a revolutionary, so he visits Lin again and hopes to find some evidence. He finds a diary in Lin's drawer but Lin grabs it, arousing Shu's suspicions. Shu dreams of promotion that night and in his dream he gets everything he wants, including Miss Ma. He is sleepless for several days, and convinces himself gradually that this is his and Lin's destiny, they are all decided by fate. Finally, Shu denounces Lin as a revolutionary to his superior.

Lin is arrested. Shu is dejected and sleepless; he wants to console himself with the notion of destiny, but fails. He spends all of his money buying cigarettes, fruit and tinned meat and sends these items to Lin. Shu feels sorry for Lin, and blames himself for Lin's fate. On a Tuesday, he hears that Lin has been taken to a military tribunal. Shu feels dizzy. Colleagues congratulate him on his good fortune and ask him to treat them to celebrate his promotion. Shu curses them and runs back home. In the end, he cries on his stinking quilt, feeling guilty and full of remorse.

Shu is a typical social climber, who is literate, poorly paid, and desperate to get a promotion. Promotion, as a central image, runs through the story from the beginning to the end. The first scene of the story is a social lunch to mark the occasion of one of Shu's colleagues' promotion. In this scene, Shu constantly acts and speaks in a funny way to draw other guests' attention, which indicates that he puts a high value on the relationship between colleagues. His attitude towards his colleagues, however, is not equal. To someone who he has a similar social status to, Shu is indifferent. Shu's perfunctory greeting to "Flat Head" (Bian naodai 扁腦袋), who is his

co-worker, is indicative of this. After asking Flat Head where he works now, Shu doesn't even wait for his reply and spreads gossip about Old You in a hurry to entertain other guests. But to someone who has higher position than Shu, he flatters them all the time not to mention the host of this lunch, who has just got a promotion. Even Old You, who is on bad terms with Shu, is subject to Shu's sycophancy, when he praises his appearance after arrival. This behavior shows that Shu is a faithful follower of the rich and powerful; this is a common characteristic of a social climber.

In addition, Shu is both self-abasing and conceited. When the fortuneteller asks Shu what kind of job he has, he answers ambiguously. The host replies for him: he is a secret agent. This makes Shu rather uncomfortable, "like an iron nail penetrating his stomach, Shu Keji glances at Luo 羅. What he fears most is other people mentioning that he is a secret agent: only thirty-forty dollars per month, which makes him feel ashamed."³⁵⁴ But when Old You satirises him and claims that he is a traitor, Shu fights back and thinks: "Old You is nothing! He is a manager, indeed. But he is already fifty. I can also be a manager when I am fifty."³⁵⁵ Obviously, Shu is ashamed at being an ill-paid humble secret agent, but he believes it is possible for him to be promoted in the future. Indeed, the advice of the old fortuneteller increases Shu's confidence of promotion. However, soon after, his self-abasement beats him again: He reminds himself of one of his relatives, who was an office clerk from when he nineteen years old until he died of illness last year. Shu is afraid he will be a secret agent until he is dead, just like his relative.

Shu walks out from Luo's house feeling melancholic, thinking of his terrible living conditions; this makes him eager to get a promotion. Then the narrator presents an important metaphor: "Spring has come."³⁵⁶ "Spring" appears twelve times throughout the whole story and it contains multiple meanings. To begin with, spring is seen as emblematic of warmth and vitality, but it can also make people lethargic. As the narrator describes: "A burst of hot wind blows in his face. The spring has come. His bones melt like wax. One hundred thousand ants are crawling on his skin. Shu feels a little tired, his knees and ankles are soft, and he can't wait to sleep on the ground.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 254.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 255.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 256.

The damn spring makes him so sleepy.”³⁵⁷ This is a good time, winter is past, and the climate is warm, but Shu is in an ambivalent mood, feeling full of energy but also feeling tired simultaneously. He is eager for promotion so he can improve his living condition, but he doesn’t know how to achieve this goal and it makes him feel tired. As he says to Lin:

“My job is all relying on myself, you know. I have to find things to do by myself, then I can work, just like doing business. But I don’t have a chance to find things. I just loaf all day and night. Others have got promotions by working hard, I am still, still a...”³⁵⁸

Indeed, Shu is a secret agent; the remit of his job is to uncover revolutionaries. But he doesn’t know how to start and where to find them. From the sarcasm of Old You, who mocks Shu for holding down a job without doing a stroke of work, it seems that Shu probably has done nothing for his job yet. Thus, the idea of ‘spring’ vividly represents Shu’s restless mood at that moment. Furthermore, spring is a metaphor for Shu’s sexual desire. The narrator connects women to spring frequently. Shu is always thinking about women when “spring” appears. He reckons he should have a woman, especially when he hears that his old classmate Lin has a fiancée. Shu’s sexual desire culminates after he visits Lin’s place for the second time. His lust and jealousy deprive him of sleep. “This damn spring! He wants to sleep with a woman.”³⁵⁹ Apparently, Shu sees a woman as an item equal to delicious food, a raincoat, and an electric iron—they are the commodities he seeks. Among them, “the most important one is a woman”³⁶⁰ and he believes that promotion is the only way for him to get a woman, since he is too poor at the moment. His inner fire of sexual passion burns him day by day; this is the fundamental cause for Shu betraying his old friend Lin. Last but not least, spring alludes to Lin’s dual function for Shu. Basically, spring symbolises chance and hope. Shu urgently needs a chance for his career. As the fortuneteller told him, with the help of good luck, grabbing this chance will make him successful. Shu has expected a chance for a long time and it has come now. Zhang mentions “spring has come” repeatedly, then follows Lin. Clearly,

³⁵⁷ Ibid..

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 262.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 267.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

Lin is Shu's spring, a precious opportunity. When Shu confirms with Miss Ma that the man whom he saw on the street the previous afternoon was Lin, "Shu yells like shooting a gun."³⁶¹ Shu is just like a hunter, and now he finds the target he was long waiting for. This means he wants to inform against Lin subconsciously as soon as they meet each other. Shu grabs this chance by betraying Lin and putting him into jail. After that, "The spring has no concern with him at all. His hands are always cold and sweaty...There is no spring in his world, only death and madness."³⁶² Without doubt, literally Lin is in prison now and Shu's spring has also vanished with Lin's imprisonment. Spring is a complex symbolisation of Lin, who has double identities, being both opportunity and hope for Shu. When Shu seizes his opportunity by arresting Lin, he loses his hope at the same time. At the end of the story, Shu's life is hopeless and full of regrets.

As has been mentioned above, the main cause of Shu's betrayal is his lust. It is not hard to guess that the second driver is his jealousy. Shu is a very jealous man. He strolls the streets and finds that most of the walkers are couples: "Every man has a woman. Shu feels like he is getting a corn on his heart. He wishes these walkers who go in pairs were all brothers and sisters."³⁶³ He then refers to all of the couples he sees as brothers and sisters until the end of the text. Undoubtedly, Shu envies those men who have sex lives and feels more comfortable by imagining that they and their companions are just brothers and sisters. This sort of spiritual victory is easy to connect with Lu Xun's famous character Ah Q. In addition, Shu envies Lin particularly. He visits Lin's place and discovers that Lin has the kind of life he dreams of. Above all, Lin has a woman, which mirrors the fundamental cause of Shu's betrayal. At the end of Shu's first visit to Lin's place, Shu admires Lin's life but wouldn't like to be disgraced: "he wants to tell Lin the saying of the fortuneteller so that he will have good luck. But he considers this to be inappropriate."³⁶⁴ It is inappropriate as Shu doesn't want to alert Lin, despite him being unaware of Shu's specific job. Deep in Shu's heart, he has long planned to report Lin for his own benefit. This plan is strengthened by his jealousy of Lin's life. When Shu is ridiculed by his colleagues about his life and job, resulting in him feeling lonely, he goes to

³⁶¹ Ibid., 258.

³⁶² Ibid., 274, 276.

³⁶³ Ibid., 256.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 263.

visit Lin again. This second visit increases his jealousy. Lin's indifferent response to revolution triggers Shu's anger, for he has identified Lin as a revolutionary all the time and this assumption is beneficial to his own situation. He looks through Lin's drawers and wants to find some secrets, and he is pleased when he finds Lin is a little embarrassed. Lin was Shu's classmate, "but now one of them has such a comfortable life, the other is just a secret agent."³⁶⁵ This generates a huge imbalance in Shu's mind; his jealousy becomes hatred when it reaches its peak.

Shu is very fond of Miss Ma, as shown in his behaviour, thoughts and dreams. He happens to encounter Lin and Miss Ma walking together and identifies them as "brother and sister". The next day, he confirms Lin's identity with Miss Ma and learns that their relationship is just normal colleagueship, which makes him relax. Miss Ma knows little about Lin. As Lin's old pal, Shu would like to take this advantage to draw Miss Ma's attention by keeping her guessing.

"Shu goes to pour a cup of tea, sits opposite Miss Ma, leans forward and speaks in low tones. He is so close that he nearly kisses her. Miss Ma fears his bad breath and keeps away from him, but his head sticks into her like a nail...Miss Ma's nose is chased by Shu's mouth and has nowhere to hide, so she stands up and pretends to fetch something on the bookcase."³⁶⁶

Shu would like to get close to Miss Ma physically and also thinks of her mentally: "The most important thing is a woman, such as Miss Ma, she is not bad."³⁶⁷ Moreover, when he comes back home from the second visit to Lin's house, Shu has a dream:

"He dreams of getting a promotion this night. There is a glittering electric iron on the table. A woman is sitting on the bed, she is Miss Ma and she says she will be Lin's woman in the future, but she is falling in love with Shu now. Miss Ma is not bad for him, after all, it is spring now."³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 266.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 259.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 267.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 266.

This is an obvious dream that directly reflects Shu's inner world. Shu reckons "Miss Ma maybe loves Lin"³⁶⁹ when he asks Miss Ma if Lin is still working for the revolution and she ignores him. This comes into Shu's dream. In his dream, Miss Ma becomes Shu's woman, though she is supposed to be Lin's woman in the future. Shu grabs Miss Ma from Lin. This plot alludes to Shu's subconscious thinking pattern: his happiness cannot co-exist with Lin's. Lin has a better life than him and so Shu has to rob Lin and hurt him. In addition, as mentioned in gossip at the beginning of the story, Old You is chasing Miss Ma and wants her to be his second wife. As a manager, Old You has a far happier life than Shu. Therefore, the ownership of Miss Ma represents a happy life. She becomes a symbol of happiness. Thus, for his own sake, Shu must take the ownership of Miss Ma from Lin. Shu has done this in his dream, and to realise this action, the only way is to betray Lin. Obviously, Shu is lost in envy and betraying Lin is an inevitable result for him.

In fact, Shu betrayed the revolution a long time ago. He was a revolutionary, as Old You says in the beginning, who surrendered to the KMT. Shu is the kind of person who is loyal to himself only, doing everything in his own interest. This is his true nature. His attitude towards revolution can be clearly seen in his conversation with Lin during the second visit. Shu seriously suspects Lin is still a revolutionary:

"I think I am falling behind, you know...I fooled around all day. I would like to join the revolution again.' He keeps his eyes on Lin. Lin just smiles, without saying anything. Shu feels awkward; he reckons the old classmate who doesn't trust him is unreliable too."³⁷⁰

To Shu, revolution is just a means to earn a better life; he has no standpoint at all, this is different from "Moving On" and "After walking out", which revolution was seen as a fashion. The betrayal of revolution and Lin just meets the requirement of Shu's basic demands for the improvement of his living standards.

The third reason for Shu's betrayal is the sarcasm of Shu's colleagues. Shu was pushed over the edge by his colleagues before his second visit with Lin. Shu is

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.,265.

taunted by Chen firstly after he meets Lin, since he doesn't have a woman. Shu is pretty upset as Chen was a secret agent just like himself, but he got a promotion for working hard. Now he mocks Shu. This taunt is followed by another jibe made by Old You, who teases that Shu has done nothing for his job. All of this sarcasm forces Shu into rethinking the responsibilities of his career more clearly and causes this to link to the identity of Lin. Shu has to work hard, otherwise his colleagues will laugh at him all the time. After all, his work is to report revolutionaries. Thus, the author leaves no other choice for Shu.

Actually, Shu also gives himself three causes to betray Lin so that he can feel peace in his heart: Firstly, his desire for a better living condition, represented by his sexual desire; secondly, he considers Lin's faults as a close friend, which echoes the "jealousy" part mentioned above; last but not least, as Shu truly believes, it is because of their unavoidable fate,³⁷¹ which echoes the title of this story. This reason is made by the author, by setting a character who tells a prophecy to Shu. This is the trigger for Shu's betrayal; however, it is also the least important reason. Shu thinks that he is in luck, as the fortuneteller says, and happens to encounter Lin, a potential revolutionary. This coincidence fulfills the prophecy. He has to report Lin for every reason, as this is their destiny which they cannot fight against. It is a convenient method to blame fate, rather than one's personal desires and emotions. But Shu denies this reason since he cannot persuade himself completely: "If this is destiny, why he is still feeling so bad?"³⁷² The truth is, as a secret agent, Shu is a weak person, which means he is not suitable for his job. When the three people go to arrest Lin, they have a conversation on the road:

"Lao Gan 老干 says: 'Our job is merciless. How many people are we going to offend and how many sins will we commit? All because of this job. But what options do we have?'... Another one who has a dark face reckons it would be better not to speak these words, otherwise they cannot work at all. 'This is all to make a living. There are no good guys or bad guys in the world, all are making a living. It is hard to say who is right or wrong.'... Shu says: 'This is destiny, to be honest...I'm doing this job, and coincidentally I met him. This is fate, and I...We all

³⁷¹ Ibid.,270.

³⁷² Ibid.,274.

have our destiny, who can fight against his destiny? ... I do not owe him, what do you say? Do I owe him? ...' 'Of course. You owe him nothing. Everyone has to do his job and there is no other way...If we think of the debt we owe, we can do nothing. This is what you called destiny.'"³⁷³

In this conversation, all three people approve of a philosophy of life which allows them to accept offending people as an inevitability. They don't need to care about these things, as they are just doing their job and earning a living. Shu's idea of fate meets the philosophy of his two companions, he feels more comfortable when hearing this. However, this is just a temporary mental state. He tries to explain this by using the philosophy of life; Lin's reply is very concise: "I know...You don't have to tell me, I know already."³⁷⁴ with a miserable smile. Hence, Lin also understands this philosophy and he doesn't blame Shu. In a sick society, this philosophy of life is inevitable. One either accepts it to get a better life without regret and remorse, or struggles at the bottom of society for the rest of one's life. To Lin, this is a normal thing, just like Shu's two companions' response: "Their faces are expressionless, they are totally unconcerned, seems more common than drinking tea."³⁷⁵ We can draw the conclusion that Shu's companions have seen similar scenes many times before. Betraying friendships is quite a normal thing for their job as they are secret agents. One has to accept the philosophy as soon as one begins work in this career, otherwise, it is hard to get a promotion. Shu is too weak to accept this ruthless philosophy. He especially feels ashamed since Lin doesn't blame him at all. After Lin's arrest, Shu has deep regrets for his betrayal. "He desperately thinks about spring. He will have a better life soon late, the electric iron, woman, and the raincoat. But all of these things are just abstract nouns, dim and wavering."³⁷⁶ Shu's expectation of happiness fades away. He is too pained and his fatalism cannot persuade him. His deep regret nearly drives him crazy; he even wants to help Lin to escape by digging a hole or murdering guards. Apparently, Shu is not a suitable secret agent. In this type of career, only heartless people can work hard and get promoted. Shu is both a selfish and merciful man; he can betray his friend for his own interest, but also feels ashamed and regretful after doing this. He is not a good

³⁷³ Ibid.,270, 271.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.,272.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.,273.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.,274.

man, nor a bad man either. This contradiction will make him struggle between the middle and lower class for the rest of his life, just like his relative, as he thinks of the KMT party. Therefore, it is Shu's complex personality that contributes to his tragedy, and this is the true destiny that Shu cannot fight against.

This short story is satirical. The title "Fatalism and Fortune-telling" means everyone has their own fate and this is predetermined. Shu believes what the fortuneteller says, and links his upcoming good fortune to the encounter with his old classmate Lin, a potential revolutionary. In the end, Zhang hints Shu will get a promotion soon, but he is in deep agony due to his regret about the betrayal. He blames the fortuneteller and considers this to be their tragic fate. In effect, if there were no fortuneteller to tell his fortune, the result would still be the same. The decisive factor is the social darkness, which leads to an unavoidable tragedy. This is the theme of the story. The key factor of Shu's personal tragedy is that he is a selfish but also kind-hearted person who cannot enjoy the benefits of his betrayal with peace of mind, like his other promoted colleagues. Ironically, even though fate is an insignificant factor for this tragedy, Shu does fulfill the prophecy in the end. This is a great irony, which endows the story with deeper levels of meaning. Do fate and fortune-telling make sense? Zhang leaves us no answer.

"Fatalism and Fortune-telling" is a typical story that delineates the social climber in modern China in the 1920s and 1930s. The grey life of the social climber gives us an idea about the social background of that time and the unavoidable tragedy of the social climber shows us the cruelty of society. Apart from this one, there are some other works of Zhang under this category that are worthy of exploration. However, in a way, "Fatalism and Fortune-telling" is untypical in its category. In mode three, nearly all social climbers fail in the end: in "The Bao Father and Son", Xiao Bao is excluded from the school so Lao Bao's dream of changing life is collapse; in "Lu Baotian", Lu Baotian is dead; in "Leather Belt", Deng Bingsheng is expelled, etc. Only in the end of "Fatalism and Fortune-telling", Shu gets promotion he dreams of, but he is too regretful, even gets angry when colleagues congratulate him. His personal feeling and the triumph of his job forms a tension, which deepens the irony.

Section IV: “Sons and Daughters”

As a Left-Wing writer, Zhang Tianyi wrote some leftist fiction from an ideological perspective. Thus, propaganda for revolution was another important mode in Zhang's works. Basically, this type of work is more agitational, belongs to proletarian dramas, and, according C.T. Hsia, “is usurped by a band of little differentiated men shouting the same slogans and profanity.”³⁷⁷ In this section, “Sons and Daughters” has been selected as it is more complex than “Twenty-One”, “The Bread Line” and “The Last Train”; these are as C.T. Hsia comments, “predictably simple and uninteresting”.³⁷⁸

“Sons and Daughters” was first published in *Literary Quarterly Magazine* (Wenxue jikan 文學季刊 vol.1, no.4) on Dec. 16th, 1934. It is a story regarding a rascal of a local tyrant and peasants' revolt. There is some overlap with mode two. The story happens in a village in the 1920s. Uncle Guangchuan 廣川 has three children: the older son, Dacai 大才, works for the bus company of a local tyrant, master Lian 廉大爺; the second son, Hei Er 黑二, is a tenant farmer; a daughter, Xiao Yin'er 小銀兒, has been engaged to the son of an oil press owner by her father, and Lian is the middleman. Guangchuan is very satisfied with this marriage and received 50 dollars as part of the agreement, but Xiao Yin'er dislikes the oil press as well as this arranged marriage. Unexpectedly, she disappears before the wedding day. This shocks Guangchuan, leaving him on the verge of despair. He had a traditional education, and failed the imperial examination. He served as a tutor for Master Lian's children but now the young masters go to the new academy and Guangchuan loses his job. But Lian still treats him politely and courteously; this makes him regard Lian as the only one who understands him in the village. Lian recruits Guangchuan's eldest son Dacai in his coach company, but he does not arrange a job for Hei Er. The reason, as Guangchuan reckons, is Hei Er's fault. Hei Er “always curses, sometimes quarrels with private advisers, or even threatens to burn down Lian's pawnshop.”³⁷⁹ Guangchuan scolds him, saying he is irresponsible, and feels afraid he would lead

³⁷⁷ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1961), 214.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Sons and daughters” (Er nǚ men 兒女們), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.3 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 104.

Xiao Yin'er astray. Guangchuan waits for his daughter for three days without news.

Lian is planning to build a city gate and tax the villagers for it. His purpose, he declares, is to guard against bandit attacks in winter. However, Hei Er asserts it is because Lian is afraid the bandits will rob his bus station. Lian summons Guangchuan to his house. Guangchuan curses and blames this era for the huge changes in people's hearts, ruing particularly the way his children have failed him. Lian agrees with him very much, which makes Guangchuan feel better. Lian urges him to find Xiao Yin'er, but Lian's fifth concubine exposes his real purpose: Lian just wants Xiao Yin'er as another concubine. It is a very embarrassing moment. Lian hurries to ask Guangchuan to do three things: order Hei Er to find Xiao Yin'er by tomorrow; explain to the villagers the importance of building the city gate, and persuade the villagers to raise the funds for it. Guangchuan agrees.

Hei Er and the other young people organise an opposition against the fundrasing, since common people have nothing to fear from bandits and they are too poor to be robbed. They think Lian is worried about his Coach Company and pawnshop, so this city gate is actually being built for his sake. They decide not to pay any tax for the gate, and whoever comes to collect it will be attacked. Guangchuan hears their discussions and feels sad and lonely.

Dacai comes back home, which delights his father. The two brothers share the same attitude towards the gate tax. The next day Lian summons Guangchuan again and demands the refund of 50 dollars, otherwise he will be accused of bandit connections, since he blocks the establishment of the gate for defending their village. He walks home in a melancholic mood and sees many villagers (especially the young people) demonstrating against Lian, including Dacai. Guangchuan faints and falls down on someone. Then the people get the news that tax collectors are making the rounds and one villager who has no money has been arrested, accused of connections with bandits. The crowd is furious and they resolve to rebel. Guangchuan is carried home by his sons. He tells Dacai that Lian is a kind man who helps many people, including Dacai himself, so Daicai should not join the rebellion. Dacai says father has been cheated by Lian and his job is not at all like what Guangchuan imagined. Indeed, Dacai asserts that Lian is totally bad. Guangchuan is

still upset and asks Dacai not to join them. Finally, Dacai and Hei Er leave Guangchuan at home and join the insurgency. Guangchuan despairs and feels that the whole world is against him.

As mentioned above, "Sons and Daughters" is a more complicated story, as compare to Zhang's other works in this category. The most important reason is its complicated character relationships. The children of Guangchuan represent the potential revolutionary force. They are young, vigorous, and open to new thought. On the contrary, Guangchuan symbolises the old, decayed, backward feudal force, who have been influenced by systematic traditional education very deeply. He reads the Four Books and Five Classics, and advocates endurance, fealty and honesty. From Guangchuan's perspective, all of his three children are rebels. The debate between Guangchuan and his children symbolises the conflict between the old tradition of Confucianism and the new trend for revolution. The rebellion of the children is reflected in the resistance against Master Lian, who is the man Guangchuan respects, a local tyrant. Thus, there is a triangular relationship. On one hand, the children of Guangchuan revolt against Lian and Guangchuan as they are allies. On the other hand, Lian oppresses Guangchuan and his children. Guangchuan aligns with the one who oppresses him and this absurd relationship makes the story more ironic and meaningful.

By the way, from the perspective of language, this story is also a good case to show how Zhang provides different daily speech to the people from different educational background and social status. Such as Guangchuan, who was educated under the traditional education system, his tone and oral language is like intellectual's exquisite language. But his two sons, espically Hei Er who disobeys his father, speaks more wildly and even contains dirty words. The difference of their oral language shows Zhang's talent of grasp of language, which makes his characters more real.

The story's narration begins when Xiao Yin'er has been gone for three days. Guangchuan stays at home, alone and melancholic, which foreshadows the last scene of the story. The difference between them is that Guangchuan still has hope in the first scene, still expecting his daughter and elder son, but he despairs at the end. The whole story shows the process of his sons and daughter betraying him in

sequence. Technically, these three children betray him for the same reason – opposing Lian, which is the same as opposing and betraying Guangchuan, since he identifies himself as being “on the same side with Lian”.³⁸⁰

Hei Er is the first child who betrays his father. Guangchuan dislikes Hei Er very much, for Hei Er’s behavior is completely opposite to Guangchuan’s traditional moral values. Guangchuan demonstrates that: “Master Lian is so kind to people...he never treats you badly...everyone has to go through the tough days. If one is a dutiful and well-behaved, Lian will definitely promote him. No pain, no gain.”³⁸¹ But Hei Er always disobeys his father, he opposes Lian and threatens to burn his pawnshop down. These behaviors challenge the patriarchy that Guangchuan believes in. So Guangchuan has abandoned his hope for Hei Er long time ago; he resolves to move to Dacai’s place after his daughter’s marriage and leaves Hei Er alone.

In addition, Guangchuan is afraid that Hei Er will mislead Xiao Yin’er. She expresses her dissatisfaction with this arranged marriage. Guangchuan replies with surprise: “What a shame! A girl talking about such a thing!”³⁸² For Guangchuan, his daughter has no say in this matter. He, as the girl’s father, has the full right to make the decision. Xiao Yin’er’s dissatisfaction is also a potential challenge to his patriarchy. This matter doesn’t alert Guangchuan, for he considers Xiao Yin’er to be a good girl, not like Hei Er. But she fails him by escaping. This is a heavy blow to Guangchuan, who doesn’t even believe it at first. Xiao Yin’er is the second child to betray their father. Guangchuan feels so lonely: “The elder son is not here. The second son is hopeless. He reckoned there was only Xiao Yin’er and himself in this world, but...now he is alone, in such a big world.”³⁸³ He doesn’t understand why such a good girl would betray him. As we can see from the text, Xiao Yin’er escapes marriage since she doesn’t like the young master of the oil press and cries every time she thinks of him. There is a description of him during Lian’s meeting about donation. He is depicted negatively. From Hei Er’s talk, we can deduce that the young master is disabled, physically or mentally. So master Lian would like to take Xiao Yin’er as his secret concubine, by using the young master as a cover. But

³⁸⁰ Ibid.,103.

³⁸¹ Ibid.,103,104.

³⁸² Ibid.,105.

³⁸³ Ibid.,106.

Guangchuan doesn't know or doesn't care about these things. He replies to Xiao Yin'er's dissatisfaction: "Isn't he a good boy? He has a good living...A young master of an oil press, with good family conditions, nice behaviour, and a relative of Lian. Women are rushing to marry him."³⁸⁴ Guangchuan presents three advantages of the young master: good living, nice behavior and being Lian's relative. According to Guangchuan, the young master is a pretty suitable son-in-law as he is a wealthy man; his "nice behavior" means that he obeys his father; and he has a powerful family background. He is suitable for every aspect of Guangchuan's traditional values; he considers that this marriage would secure his daughter's happiness. Moreover, the marriage is also beneficial for himself. He gets 50 dollars as agreement, and he will unite with master Lian by marriage. Thus, Guangchuan sells his daughter at a good price, with no care for her feelings about this marriage. What he believes is that children should sacrifice their individual will to obey their father unconditionally, a common rule in traditional society. But now both his son and daughter break the rule. They challenge the patriarchy, which is the core value of the tradition. Guangchuan blames this on the earth-shaking changes of the time.

After Xiao Yin'er's departure, Dacai becomes Guangchuan's last hope. Dacai is a so called well-behaved man and this is why his father likes him so much. Dacai is not like Hei Er, who is talkative. "He sits down and keeps his eyes low",³⁸⁵ which symbolically means that he always listens and obeys, and this makes Guangchuan feels more like a real father. Guangchuan is very pleased when Dacai is back: "At least, he has a son in this world who is filial and obedient to him...Xiao Yin'er and Hei Er are far away from him, against him, but now he finally gets an assistant."³⁸⁶ Later on, however, Dacai also joins the opposition against Lian's tax policy, which Guangchuan had never predicted. He receives a devastating blow. Dacai is the last straw that breaks Guangchuan's back, since he identifies Dacai as his "only son".³⁸⁷ Besides, Dacai and Hei Er plan their sister's disappearance together. Hence, Guangchuan's three children unite against their father and leave him on the verge of despair.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.,105.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.,130.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.,131.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.,143.

The children fight against master Lian as he oppresses the whole village, especially their family. Lian wants both person (Xiao Yin'er) and money (gate tax) from their family. For the children, these requirements are as same as robbery. On the contrary, Guangchuan believes that they are legitimate, since he identifies Lian as the authority. He trusts, respects and relies on Lian. He reckons that they are on the same side, as Lian is also an educated man. As Dacai says: "Our father read those kinds of books – all belong to those people."³⁸⁸ And all of Guangchuan's children are uneducated, for he cannot afford to send them to school. So Guangchuan and Lian share the same educational background, which makes him decide that they are similar people. The most important thing is Lian respects Guangchuan, although it is just superficial. "Master Lian treats Guangchuan as a friend. Guangchuan is often invited to Lian's house for dinner, and his seat is not with those long-term hired hands."³⁸⁹ Lian's treatment towards Guangchuan makes him feel proud and honoured. In addition, Guangchuan regards Xiao Yin'er's disappearance as a big scandal for his family. He reckons that his daughter has humiliated him and Lian's family. He cares a great deal about his reputation; what he fears the most is rumours like this: "This old man had read Four Books and Five Classics, but brought up this kind of children who do wrong."³⁹⁰ He is fearful about people commenting on his daughter's leaving, especially in public. Lian summons Guangchuan, who is afraid that he might be blamed face to face. Instead, Lian talks with him in the wing-room with sympathy and blames her disappearance on a change of heart, which is similar to something Guangchuan would say. It seems that Lian knows Guangchuan very well and reckons they are close friends. Guangchuan believes that marrying his daughter to the young master of the oil press, which is an arrangement from Lian, could bind them together more tightly. In fact, the children receive no benefits for this marriage. This is a crucial difference between Guangchuan and his children. Furthermore, Lian wants all the villagers to share the payment of the gate to protect his personal properties. This proposal triggers intense backlash from the poor people. Thus, three children stand together with the whole village to oppose Lian, as well as their father.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.,134.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.,104.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.,110.

Master Lian is a selfish, hypocritical, cunning and unkind local tyrant. Apart from appealing to raise funds to protect his personal properties, he deceives the gentry during the meeting into believing that building a city gate is beneficial for the whole village. Ironically, the place where they hold this meeting is named Bodhi, which means benevolence. Lian points out that he drops his business for this proposal.

“It relates to public life and property that I must concern...I have lots of things to do in my bus company. However, after balancing my priorities, I have to come back for the safety of our village. For everyone’s life and property, I’d rather sacrifice my own company.”³⁹¹

Undoubtedly, Lian is full of lies and hypocrisy. Also, to persuade people, he describes how the bandits rob other villages. He emphasises that they torture and kill old people who cannot run fast, since most of the participants of the meeting are senior citizens. According to the intellectuals like Guangchuan who mostly care about morality and etiquette, Lian describes that the bandits throw memorial tablets of ancestry into toilets and they even use *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius* as toilet paper. Lian’s speech is manipulating, antagonising the weaknesses of different groups of people. Moreover, he summons Guangchuan for two reasons. One is to ask where Xiao Yin’er is; another is asking Guangchuan to persuade the villagers to raise money. Lian treats Guangchuan very politely and sees him to the door. Actually, Guangchuan is not qualified to attend this meeting that is full of gentry and officials of the village; he is invited as Lian regards him as a sort of representative of normal villagers. Guangchuan is chosen by Lian as a tool to propagandise the policy, for he is an educated man. “The villagers are uneducated and unreasonable. Guangchuan should enlighten them on the issue of raising funds.”³⁹² Thus, Lian makes use of Guangchuan in order to achieve his goal and simultaneously flatters Guangchuan, calling him an educated man. Lian knows that an educated man like Guangchuan would think highly of his own reputation. So Lian use Guangchuan’s pride as a bargaining chip. To save pride, Guangchuan has to find his errant daughter; as an intellectual, he has to persuade those uneducated villagers. Hence, Lian acquires Guangchuan’s loyalty only by treating him politely.

³⁹¹ Ibid.,112.

³⁹² Ibid.,118.

However, this is just on a superficial level. Lian's attitude towards Guangchuan reverses completely during their third meeting. He doesn't ask Guangchuan to sit down or serve him a cup of tea. His tone is cold, like talking with a long-term hired hand, which results in Guangchuan's embarrassment. This is because Lian is ruthless when someone owes him money and refuses to repay. As the villagers say, Lian once sued a peasant who borrowed money from him. Therefore, Guangchuan is essentially the same as other villagers for Lian. But frankly speaking, prosecuting someone who refuses to pay back a loan is not unreasonable. In fact, apart from arresting a villager who cannot pay the gate tax, the only illegal thing that Lian has done in the text is he once took a hilly area from a peasant by threatening and cheating. As to the rest, although running a modern bus company makes many coachmen lose their jobs and setting up a pawnshop exploits the needy, are all reasonable and lawful. So Lian is not a villain through and through, he is just a greedy business man. But his "villainy" arouses great anger from the villagers.

The cause of the villagers' opposition is money. Guangchuan identifies Xiao Yin'er as a commodity to sell. But it is not mentioned where the money is being spent in the text. In effect, there is a perfect balance between income and expenditure when Guangchuan fulfils Lian's two requirements (Xiao Yin'er and six dollars for the gate tax). Guangchuan gets 50 dollars at first for his daughter's engagement, and then he is asked to return the money to the owner of the oil press for Xiao Yin'er's disappearance, plus his share for the gate tax. Later on, the following compromise is that Lian gives up finding Xiao Yin'er, but combines his two requirements into demanding 50 dollars. All Guangchuan needs to pay is 50 dollars, which means he can just return the deposit he got from the engagement and pay nothing else. From the beginning to the end, the family of Guangchuan loses nothing from these financial deals, unlike the other villagers, who are commanded to pay their gate tax. But apparently, Guangchuan has spent this money and wants to pawn his family heirloom to pay his share of gate tax; he also has to find Xiao Yin'er for he cannot return the deposit for her engagement. Where did the money go? We can imagine that it was spent on his family's living expenses. Either way, Guangchuan owes the owner of the oil press 50 dollars, regardless of other factors.

Thus Lian's requirement for collecting 50 dollars from Guangchuan is legitimate, and

Guangchuan's sons refusal to return the money is a kind of roguery. Actually, Dacai knows they have to pay back the deposit anyway: "He says they have no money, so currently they cannot do anything about it. But they have to pay it back sooner or later. Quarreling doesn't help."³⁹³ After that, Dacai becomes a leader of the opposition, who advocates to block the tax collectors. In this aspect, Dacai and Hei Er are just like their enemy Lian, who makes use of others to achieve his goal. Lian wants to protect his personal properties, Dacai and Hei Er want to abolish the debt of their family by using violence, and their debt is surely far more than the other villagers' gate tax. Therefore, the cause of Dacai and Hei Er starting a revolution – the eradication of their debt – is illegal and self-centred. Of course, all revolution is illegal to the current authority. But this illegality is not only for their current social system but for all. Dacai suggests fighting against the tax collectors, and others follow him blindly, except Guangchuan since he considers this to be an illegal rebellion. In a way, at least for his family, he is right. This might be the fundamental reason to explain why Guangchuan stands against his sons and feels ashamed as he owes money to Lian (the owner of oil press has transferred this debt relationship from Guangchuan to Lian). This is a contradiction: Zhang advocates and authorises revolution but he doesn't legitimise it. Unlike the dichotomy of the normal propaganda of revolution where revolution is absolutely righteous and the authority is totally vicious, Zhang offers a more nuanced representation of this power relationship within this story. In the category of propaganda for revolution, Zhang normally describes revolution as a justicial action and ends in victory. Such as "The Bread Line" I analysed in chapter III section II, the whole process of revolution is righteous, and the end of the story is described as a triumph. This is a typical pattern that Left-Wing writers used to follow. But in "Sons and Daughters", deliberately or unconsciously, the illegality of revolution is hidden in the text. This might be Zhang's exclusive contribution to Left-wing realist works.

Another difference in this work is that there are lots of descriptions of scenery, far more frequently deployed here than in Zhang's other works. Zhang once summarised his five artistic rules, one of them was "Do not write scenery descriptions that have nothing to do with the subject matter."³⁹⁴ Hence, the scenery

³⁹³ Ibid.,135.

³⁹⁴ Sima Changfeng 司馬長風, "The History of New Chinese Literature" (Zhongguo xin wenxue shi 中國新文學史), in

descriptions in this story must closely relate to its characters and theme, and be full of symbolic meanings.

The first one is at the very beginning:

“In the evening, it is so dark that one can barely see in the room. It is so windy outside. The wind blows hard, turning the sky yellow and filling the air with choking sand. The ground is trembling. The black cloud is like a thick iron that is sinking into the ground. It nearly reaches the roof and is about to squash the room.”³⁹⁵

Apparently, the chaotic scene with the bad weather symbolises a circumstance before the revolution. The time is in the evening, alluded to by the social darkness, just before the dawn of revolution. The wind is strong and the ground is trembling, which suggests that the world will soon be turned upside down. The room refers to the old world, which is going to be destroyed. All these metaphors predict a big change in the world, just like Guangchuan always says. “These days, everything is disordered...son disobeys father, young fellow doesn’t believe the good guy.”³⁹⁶ A new age is coming, the old things that cannot keep up with the times will be abandoned and destroyed.

Before Guangchuan goes to Lian’s house for the first time, there is another scenery description, which depicts black clouds which are heavy and cold. It vividly describes Guang-chuan’s deep psychological depression as a result of his daughter’s leaving and the changing world. The black clouds sink deeper than before, and appear again when he walks out from Lian’s house and suffocate him. He is confused as to why his son and other young fellows hate decent people like Lian so much, and why his children betray him one by one. He cannot understand this broken world. When Guangchuan goes to meet Lian for the second time, it snows heavily and covers the whole world, which signifies that the revolution will bury the old world. The most devastating weather appears before the revolution.

Shen Chengkuan et al. eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 421.

³⁹⁵ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “Sons and daughters” (Er nǚ men 儿女们), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.3 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 101.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 102, 103.

“The sky is still heavy, and keeps sinking into the ground, as if all the clouds in the universe gather together here. It seems like that there will never be a sunny day. The heavy snow is going to flatten the earth.”³⁹⁷

All of these scenic descriptions highlight a huge pressure. Guangchuan feels stressed by the changing world; the young fellows such as Dacai and Hei Er also face great pressure from Lian about money. Finally, the arrest of a peasant who refuses to pay the tax triggers the revolution, and the old world of this village collapses.

In addition, there is a core metaphor in the text – the gate that Lian proposes to build and promises will secure everyone’s safety. In effect, the gate is an important symbol, which both protects and imprisons the villagers. At first, the gate is emblematic of the order or rule that both Lian and Guangchuan advocate and emphasise repeatedly. They feel that the current world lacks order and is full of perversion: “The gate...well, this world is upside-down, master Lian, really reversed....It is hard to imagine if we don’t build the gate. It concerns everyone’s lives- this is the public’s life, our life. Yes, yes....”³⁹⁸ They give this event a significant meaning in reestablishing the order of the village. Also, the gate is a barrier that isolates the village from the outside world and prevents the villagers from knowing what is happening outside. The refusal to raise funds to build the gate is not only because the villagers are poor, but also, they have a desire to break the barrier for joining the trend of nationwide revolution. The villagers are not afraid of the bandits, as they know the bandits were impoverished peasants originally and they are harmful only for the rich. Actually, the bandits represent the revolutionary force in the outside world. Young fellows like Dacai and Hei Er who launch the revolution in their village would like to join them. Hence, the argument between Guangchuan and his children regarding the gate represents the clash of their differing attitudes toward revolution – conservatism vs radicalism. The triumph of the latter represents Zhang’s attitude towards revolution, which has been analysed in Chapter III section II. The old social system, which Guangchuan stands for, contains his faith, values and

³⁹⁷ Ibid.,139.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.,117.

philosophy, but it is about to collapse. He mourns for its ruin and sighs for this troubled time, despite being himself a victim of feudalism. He was born and lived with it for a quite long time, so he has internalised and accepted this system. This might also be related to Guangchuan's class-consciousness. He was an intellectual who was educated through the old education system. The revolt aims to undermine the old social system, which Guangchuan belongs to and agrees with. Hence, the revolution is for the benefit of all victims, whereas Guangchuan, as one of the victims, despises it.

The contradiction and complexity of this story makes it outstand in its category. Guangchuan's attitude towards rebellion contradicts his low social status, this satire has profound social and historical significance. Also, although Zhang didn't show it distinctly, he didn't legitimise this rebellion on economic aspect. This makes this rebellion born with original sin, which is totally different from the propaganda of revolution in most Left-Wing fiction. I consider this is Zhang's unique contribution to Left-Wing literature.

Section V: “New Life”

Three Sketches (*Suxie sanpian* 速寫三篇, 1943) is a short story collection containing Zhang Tianyi's only works of fiction set during the period of War of Resistance Against Japan. “The Work of Mr. Tan Jiu” and Zhang's most famous work, “Mr. Hua Wei”, discuss the same topic: wartime politics. The protagonists are keen to pursue political power during wartime. The former may be viewed as a trial run for the latter, which had the greatest impact among Zhang's oeuvre. “New Life” is the final work of the trilogy and also the last fiction for adults that Zhang wrote, since his later literary output was limited largely to children's fiction. By considering its uniqueness, “New Life” has been chosen to be analysed as representative of mode five.

“New Life” was first published in *Literary Battle Formation* (*Wenyi Zhendi* 文藝陣地 vol.2, no.2) on November 1st, 1938. It starts off in the wartime context of the Japanese invasion of the Chinese mainland. Li Yimo 李逸漠 comes to find Principal Pan 潘 of a high school in a small town and asks for a job. Li was a famous writer and an artist, and was known as “the purest artist”. He used to advocate art for art's sake. Then he tells Pan that his hometown was about to be occupied by Japanese, so he had to flee and left a wife and daughter with his father-in-law in village in southern Zhejiang 浙江. The old days have long gone, he wouldn't like to hide with his family in the remote village; what he wanted is to make his own contributions to the War of Resistance. So he decided to become a teacher and to start a new life.

Li starts his new life soon, directing the literary and art clubs of the school, and writing articles for the school weekly paper. He also intends to make some meaningful propaganda posters. In this new circumstance, however, he sometimes misses his comfortable former life. He feels depressed, although he tries his best to think positively.

The students do not get along with Li and keep a distance from him. They regard him as a celebrity, who is too far away from them, and despise him for being such an important man. One Saturday evening, Li is fed up and tells Pan that there is a “dull

disease” or “grey disease”³⁹⁹ in the school, which has infected him. He invites Pan out for a drink, Li drinks and talks a lot, recalling his golden days: drinking old wine in delicate cups; his collection of books, stamps, calligraphy and paintings; his wife and daughter and so forth. They come back to the school and Li feels lonely, pitying himself when he thinks of his dull bedroom, which is very simple and crude. He wishes that he was in a long dream, the Japanese army invasion is just a hallucination. When he wakes up, he will be back to his original tranquil life.

Li feels increasingly lonely. One day he draws a caricature after drinking: a soldier is walking with a citizen by holding his hand, entitled “Cooperation of Army and People.” He is a little ashamed for this propaganda, since he thinks it doesn’t belong to the art that he used to create. He believes that his reputation has been smeared by this cartoon. From this moment, he refuses to submit any of his work to the school paper. He has feels completely isolated in the school.

Gradually, Li begins to get along with Old Zhang 老章, who is rather conservative and rejects the Vernacular Movement, and he even opposes the Sino-Japanese war. But somehow, they share some interests, such as collecting calligraphy rubbings and stamps. Li begins to daydream of sleeping for decades, and then waking up to see a strong and powerful China. He misses his comfortable lifestyle and wants to get back to his hometown. He guesses that the areas controlled by Japan might be better than he thought, with no resistance and no slaughter. Soon he realizes this is the traitor’s theory that Old Zhang proposes. Finally, he understands that he and Old Zhang are the same people.

In “New Life”, Zhang Tianyi approaches his protagonist with great psychological specificity, just like Sang Hua in “Moving on”. Li Yimo is a traditional artist whose tranquil and artistic life is interrupted by the Japanese invasion. Tremendously shaken by this exotic encroachment, Li resolves to devote his future energies to the Resistance. He takes up the position as a fine art teacher of a high school that is far beneath his talents. The story shows us the very specific spiritual journey of Li acting on his resolution. On the first level, as Marston Anderson remarks:

³⁹⁹ Ibid.,273.

“Zhang Tianyi clearly intends his story as a straightforward morality play: the poles of committed engagement and treasonous capitulation are personified by two of Li’s colleagues at the school, the energetic physics teacher, Mr. Chen, and the learned but old-fashioned instructor of Chinese, Mr. Zhang. Li Yimo is drawn to the latter man’s company because of their shared interests in alcohol and antiquities.... Li’s selection of drinking partners comes increasingly to figure in the story as an ethical and political choice. Li’s decision at the close of the story to slip out of a political meeting to go drinking with Mr. Zhang is clearly intended to signify Li’s final defection from the high road of political engagement.”⁴⁰⁰

Indeed, Li’s hesitation between involvement in Resistance and escape from its realities is rather clearly shown in the following description:

“He didn’t know when they had formed, but puffs of white cloud were now skirting furtively across the sky as though trying to avoid detection. The shadows in the room faded, then reappeared. Mr. Yimo’s face by turns darkened and brightened.”⁴⁰¹

This passage appears when Li wants to write an attack on Old Zhang and fails. By delineating the emotional struggle between darkness and light, Zhang Tianyi describes Li as a typical escapist among intellectuals in China’s War of Resistance. Li flees reality and seeks spiritual refuge. He can be recognised as a representative intellectual who feels out of place in the united front of Resistance, and the reason is his wealthy habitat and traditional aestheticism.

In some ways, Li Yimo does not belong to the era of Resistance but to the age of peace. He is a well-educated and famous artist. But his first appearance at the very beginning is quite like a drowned mouse:

⁴⁰⁰ Marston Anderson, “Realism’s Last Stand: Character and Ideology in Zhang Tianyi’s ‘Three Sketches’” in *Modern Chinese Literature* Vol.5, No.2, China’s War of Resistance (San Francisco: San Francisco State University Center for the Study of Modern Chinese Literature, 1989), 191.

⁴⁰¹ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, “New Life” (Xin sheng 新生), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.4 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 268. (Translated by Marston Anderson)

“He wore dusty heavy coat and took two heavy dirty luggage. He was tall and thin, with a tar black face. He had not shaved for over two weeks, so he looked like more than fifty although he was only in his 40s. His glasses were contaminated by dust, as if dirty windows....Such an appearance was quite hard to match his exquisite works.”⁴⁰²

Financially, Li was once a rich man. His income was largely reliant on the rent for his land, which was suddenly cut off by the war. He ran away from his extravagant house and moved to the school clinic. There are many passages showing the huge contrast between Li's past and present life.

“This is a dull room, as if there is no one single creature in this world apart from Yimo. The walls are painted in lemon: clean, but monotonous. No decoration, but only a few basic furniture, some stationeries and his two small leather luggage. The white electric light shines in the room, makes him feeling cold and lonely.

In such a circumstance, he has to start his ‘new life’!

He feels sad suddenly. He identifies himself as a pathetic loner, no relatives, nor friends. No one cares about and looks after him. This is the first strange situation he has ever experienced since he was born.

[...]

He wishes that all of this is just a dream. He is still at home when he wakes up, on his warm and cozy bed. His wife has made him a cup of red tea, his book is on the tea table, his daughter hands him a cigarette and lights it. She smiles and says:

‘Dad, you have slept for quite some time.’”⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² Ibid.,267.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.,276,277.

Li got used to a refined lifestyle in his hometown, while he has to endure dull people, food, and a meaningless routine in the school, which results in him being infected by “the grey disease”, as he complains. No doubt, they are totally different worlds. So this is why Li feels anguished in the school. Apart from material conditions, however, Li’s mental distress is the fundamental cause for his loneliness.

Li has an interest in collecting antiques and is particularly obsessed with little jaunts in life such as drinking wine with some snacks just to kill time. But this kind of entertainment is luxurious in wartime. His colleagues (especially Mr. Chen) are busy working for the Resistance. Li intended to join them to make his own contribution at the very start; he did, by drawing a propagandist caricature, but then he quit. Propaganda is a major work of the Resistance, but Li is reluctant to engage. His reluctance is not due to a lack of patriotism. The narrator emphasises Li’s love for China with a high degree of confirmation, particularly in the opening passage. But he cannot agree that propaganda is a kind of art. There is a passage of Q and A in Li’s class which shows his aestheticism explicitly:

[Li said,] “I hope you can draw propaganda posters as many as possible and stick them on the walls, to awaken people. No matter the painting techniques, as long as they can understand. It is not a good time to discuss art. At present, art is useless.’

‘Mr. Li, how about those propaganda posters? Do they belong to art?’

‘They are not art!’ Mr. Li answers very excited.

‘Do you mean all propaganda posters are not artwork?’

As a teacher, Li has a little pity for the student. Such an obvious question! But Li answers him patiently. Propaganda is propaganda, it has nothing to do with art. And he emphasizes repeatedly: What we need now is to awaken and encourage people. He waves his right hand in the air, and speaks faster gradually.

‘...Now the greatest people are soldiers who fight on the front line. A so-called artist like me, is the most useless person. We must abandon art at the moment, and do work that every Chinese should do.’⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.,270,271.

Undoubtedly, Li believes true art is useless at present, as well as the true artist, which means that he confirms the artist's impotence in times of national crisis. The reason, as Li indicates, is that there are irreconcilable differences between art and propaganda. When he draws the propaganda poster, he feels a profound embarrassment for his usage of art to convey propaganda meanings. He thinks his fame has been ruined by this work. "Li Yimo draws such a picture! What a shame! Shame!"⁴⁰⁵ Li's aesthetic theory is quite traditional, which is pursuing depth, complexity and ambiguity. Nevertheless, propaganda is just the opposite. It requires transparent declarations of ideology. There is a black and white model, no middle ground. For propaganda, clarity is all. This pattern produces, in Marston Anderson's phrase, "a 'petrification' of the emotions, an unbearable sensation of 'dullness.'"⁴⁰⁶ As "the purest artist", Li performs his aesthetic theory both in his art and life, which absolutely contradicts the propaganda model. In addition, one of the most important points in propaganda work is repetition. With incalculable rallies and meetings, propaganda emphasises and enhances its key message repeatedly, so it lacks originality. However, Li despises plagiarism. When he wants to respond to Old Zhang's escapist theory, he hesitates and thinks: "Such talk did not arise from opinions which he had independently conceived, and he feared it would be met with derision: 'Huh! Yimo only knows how to plagiarise!'"⁴⁰⁷

Therefore, Li Yimo does not belong to this era of Resistance, both physically and mentally. He feels desperately lonely in the school, with no family or friends. Even his students don't like him: "They seem would not like to bother him for he is a big man, and they also look down upon him....They always say: 'This is Li Yimo.' With surprise and irony simultaneously."⁴⁰⁸

Li's only spiritual refuge is alcohol, but no one would like to drink with him except Old Zhang. Actually, Old Zhang is a typical character that depicts as Dickensian character

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.,280.

⁴⁰⁶ Marston Anderson, "Realism's Last Stand: Character and Ideology in Zhang Tianyi's 'Three Sketches'" in *Modern Chinese Literature* Vol.5, No.2, China's War of Resistance (San Francisco: San Francisco State University Center for the Study of Modern Chinese Literature, 1989), 192.

⁴⁰⁷ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "New Life" (Xin sheng 新生), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.4 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 284.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.,272.

description skill, he always says “I apologize for my own inconvenience, this is supposed to my treat” or “some day I will invite you to my place for a few drinks” or “today I am a little short”⁴⁰⁹. These repetitions for take advantage of Li Yimo make Old Zhang a hypocritical and despicable man. Although Li is not fond of Old Zhang, he has no choice. The author places Li in a painful moral dilemma, which is described in the following passage:

“He rubbed his hands together and deliberated writing a short piece strongly attacking Old Zhang’s way of thinking. In the end, however, he didn’t pick up the brush, nor even start outlining the piece in his mind. He wasn’t sure why, but he always felt that it was unsuitable for him to write such articles. Maybe he was out of practice, or maybe he was just not in the mood. But then again, maybe he feared that his writing would reveal something about himself – that through it people would discover that he was unconsciously tainted with the very thing that he attacked.”⁴¹⁰

Li cannot pick up his brush after he draws the propaganda poster; this echoes his statement that the “artist is useless.” He is impotent regarding artistic creation at this historical moment. Also, Li is afraid to recognise his own faults mirrored in his attack on Old Zhang. In fact, Li and Old Zhang are not in the same camp totally, although he does share some of Old Zhang’s views. Li is also reluctant to fully engage in propaganda, like Mr. Chen. Both of his alternatives cannot represent him truly and completely. But under this circumstance, there is no third choice for Li. Thus, with his choice of drinking partner, Li moves towards escapism and defeatism unavoidably, at least outwardly.

Hence, after a close reading of “New Life”, it is reasonable to argue that it does not serve ideology, so much as expose the inevitable divergence between art and propaganda. The protagonist is an artist who struggles to reconcile artistic integrity and ideological goal. Zhang Tianyi shows us a dilemma with complete sympathy when an old school artist encounters an overwhelming historical moment. Interestingly, however, “New Life” can be deemed as propaganda in itself. It clearly

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.,285.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.,293,294. (Translated by Marston Anderson)

reveals the escapists in the united front of the Resistance. Li is a representative of some frail intellectuals in wartime. But it also depicts Li's reluctance to engage in propaganda work with a surprising degree of sympathy, which is quite artistic and also realistic. It also seems to mirror the sympathy for failed people who are on the wrong side of history. This might be a kind of convergence of art and propaganda that responds to Li's aesthetic theory in the text. Accordingly, "New life" is different from the other two stories in this category as the rest two stories are talking about wartime politics. Mr. Tan Jiu in "The Work of Mr. Tan Jiu" and Mr. Hua Wei in "Mr. Hua Wei" are keen to pursue political power during wartime. Li Yimo is not interested in politics; he really would like to make his own contribution to the war of resistance, and he despises escapism and defeatism. But finally, he becomes the one he used to despise. This irony deepens the theme and makes the story more tragical.

Overall, we could find several literary ideas in the five works aboved, which have been mentioned in chapter II such as "character comes first", wide scope of social classes, character description skill and language. Also, these five works are sort of exceptions from Zhang's other works. His most representative work is "Mr. Hua Wei", its protagonist Mr. Hua Wei is a flat character, who is simple, static, lacking authenticity and psychological development. Hence, in order to show that there is more depth and ambiguity in Zhang's work than normally imagined, I have selected works here with more depth. The five short stories contain protagonists who are markedly more complex than those from most of Zhang's other works. They are more conflicted, able to doubt themselves and change their minds. This makes them stand out of the vast amount of flat characters that Zhang created. All the five works are summarised in detail since I focus on the distinctive character portraits and delicate psychological processes, which are rare in Zhang's overall literary output. Furthermore, at least in "Moving On" and "Sons and Daughters", Zhang's attitude towards revolution is unclear or remains ambiguous. He depicts it dreadful and unlawful in the two stories. This is different from his other revolutionary propagandas, it is also unique in the whole Left-Wing literature, as most of them depicts revolution as positive and rightful.

Conclusion: Selectivity, Subjectivity and Initiative of Republican Chinese Writers in Accepting Western Literature

In the history of Chinese literature, there are many examples of satirical or ironic literature: *The Book of Songs* (Shijing 詩經); *Zuo Zhuan* 左傳; *Strategies of the Warring States* (Zhanguo ce 戰國策); *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shi ji 史記); *A New Account of Tales of the World* (Shishuo xinyu 世說新語); legends of the Tang dynasty; *The Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties* (Sui tang yanyi 隋唐演義); *Journey to the West* (Xiyouji 西遊記); *The Golden Lotus* (Jin ping mei 金瓶梅); *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (Liaozhai zhi yi 聊齋誌異) and *The Scholars* (Rulin waishi 儒林外史). All of these works contain vivid ironic and satirical descriptions. While the New Culture Movement writers tended to reject traditional Chinese literature, they were aware of the ironic tradition from this classical literature and adopted techniques of satirical art from Western writers like Chekhov, Gogol, Dickens and Maupassant, accordingly forming Republican Chinese satiric literature. Many post-May Fourth writers, including Zhang Tianyi, were less critical of the traditional Chinese literary legacy while simultaneously adopting themes and styles from Western literature. Western culture was an essential part of China's cultural awakening, but they were not completely uncritical in their echoes. The Republican Chinese writers demonstrated selectivity, subjectivity and initiative when they adopted western literature.

This study is an attempt to show one specific comparison: Charles Dickens and Zhang Tianyi. It sheds light on the works of Zhang by analysing his works and showing how they echo concerns raised by Dickens in a very different context. Dickens is one of a number of writers to have parallels with Zhang, and this is the first full-length thesis of it. More broadly, this study also presents a case-study showing how there is value in a comparative approach, tracing how specific themes and characteristics are echoed in a Chinese writer in the Republican period. It is broadly recognised that modern Chinese literature was influenced by Western

literature, but very few studies try to look at this in textual detail or bring out the various aspects that were not adopted. Dickens might not be the single most important influence on Zhang, but he was an influence to some degree, and that is worth analysing. Comparative literature is the only field that makes it possible to analyse the depth and the nature of this relationship, and my analysis shows that the writers have much in common. But Zhang did not just copy Dickens, but he adopted approaches and used them for his own agenda. Prior Chinese studies of Zhang Tianyi have focused on the most well-known of his works, for instance “Mr. Hua Wei” and “Bao Father and Son”. However, these studies have rarely taken a comparative perspective, and they do not frame Zhang in the greater context of world literature. In this study, I used the comparative method to explore similarities and discrepancies between Zhang and Dickens’s works, exploring the differences between their literary and political ideas, as well as the projections in their works, then trying to expose the reasons for these differences. I found that Zhang might have learned a certain amount from Dickens, but due to the differing social contexts, varying levels of popularity and different religious views, they have obvious discrepancies. These findings extend the existing studies on Western influence upon Zhang’s literary creation, since there are only two short essays of less than 3,000 words each, on Zhang’s inheritance from Dickens.⁴¹¹ Regardless of specific influence, comparative literature says something new about literature and thought. How do writers deal with modernity, social problems, character portrayal, politics? How can such issues be transposed from 19th century England to a Chinese context? A comparison between Zhang and Dickens shows how different authors have approached these issues in different contexts.

In addition, this is the first study to my knowledge to investigate “Moving On”, “Cheng Yeheng”, “Fatalism and Fortune-telling” and “Sons and Daughters”. To a certain extent, they are exceptions from Zhang’s other works. I selected them to show that there is more depth and ambiguity in Zhang’s work than normally imagined. There is a fixed image among most critics that “nearly all characters in Zhang’s works are

⁴¹¹ Tong Zhen 童真 and Hu Baohua 胡葆華 “Zhang Tianyi and Dickens” (Zhang Tianyi yu Digengsi 張天翼與狄更斯), *Hunan daxue xuebao* vol.22, no.4 (2008): 7, and Zhang Jinjun 張晉軍 “Dickens: The Cornerstone of Zhang Tianyi’s Literature – On Zhang Tianyi’s Acceptance of Dickens” (Digengsi: Zhang Tianyi wenxue de jishi – lun Zhang Tianyi dui Digengsi yingxiang de jieshou 狄更斯: 張天翼文學的基石——論張天翼對狄更斯影響的接受), *Taiyuan daxue jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* vol.29, no.2 (2011): 6

extremely simple, lacking depth, authenticity and psychological development”.⁴¹² But Sang Hua in “Moving On”, Cheng Yeheng in “Cheng Yeheng”, Shu Keji in “Fatalism and Fortune-telling” and Li Yimo in “New life are remarkably more complex than those from most of Zhang’s other works. These protagonists are far more conflicted, able to doubt themselves and change their minds. This makes them stand out of the vast amount of flat characters that Zhang created. Also, this study has shown that Zhang made a unique contribution to Left-Wing literature in Republican China. In at least two stories, “Moving On” and “Sons and Daughters”, his description (dreadful and unlawful) of revolution or rebellion is different from the revolutionary propaganda of his contemporaries. The revolution might not be always right, and this is outstandingly rare in the Left-Wing literature. In a way, these works help illustrate the boundaries of Zhang’s work, and they help illustrate the breadth of the five categories of Zhang’s short stories that I established in Chapter IV, and I consider this attempt at categorization to be one of my contributions to Zhang Tianyi studies.

Despite these innovations, some limitations of this study are worth noting. Although I have provided insight into a few of Zhang’s less famous works, when considering Dickens and Zhang’s parallels, the perspectives I provide are not comprehensive. Zhang Tianyi’s oeuvre is a vast one, and a study like this can only go so far in providing both detailed analysis as well as broader overviews of the characteristics of his writings. Further work could focus on various issues, including the “bad names” of villains in their works, as well as the relationship between their works and the cities in which they lived.

The formation of a distinct artistic style and creative personality is a sign of the mature literary creation of an author. The key point of this maturity is that the author refuses to imitate blindly. Authors differ from each other due to their varied origins, environments, personalities, experiences, education, temperaments and artistic values, even though they might operate within the same national culture and under the same worldwide influences. Hence, individuals have their own selectivity, subjectivity and initiative when accepting Western literature. Zhang Tianyi inherited a great deal from both Chinese and foreign authors, including Chinese writers such as

⁴¹² Hu Feng 胡風, “On Zhang Tianyi” (Zhang Tianyi lun 張天翼論), in Shen, Huang, and Wu, eds. *Zhang Tianyi yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), 289.

Shi Nai'an 施耐庵, Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩, Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓, Pu Songling 蒲松齡 and Lu Xun 魯迅; and also foreign writers such as Dickens, Maupassant, Zola, Barbusse, Lev Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky, Scott Walter and Conan Doyle.⁴¹³ However, comparing with other satirical Republican writers, such as Lao She, Sha Ding and Jiang Muliang 蔣牧良, Zhang demonstrates unique and distinctive features.

Zhang Tianyi grew up in an era when three literary tides prevailed at the same time: Chinese traditional literature, Western literature and May Fourth literature. He learned from them and formed from them his own written style. Hence, Zhang simultaneously enhanced his artistic creation whilst maintaining a unique artistic individuality.

Zhang has many parallels with Dickens. However, his relationship with Dickens was not a simple causal relationship, but rather derived from many joint efforts, such as the specific restriction of historical conditions, Zhang's selectivity, subjectivity and initiative. Through these factors, Zhang became an original writer. The process of his discriminating approach is worthy of study.

The case of Zhang's selective acceptance of Dickens indicates that the Republican Chinese writers were highly aware of global perspectives whilst cultivating distinctively Chinese cultural works. It illustrates that their acceptance of Western writers was never merely passive or uncritical, but subjective. This selectivity, subjectivity and initiative made Republican Chinese literature find its own path in the flow of world literature. Furthermore, Republican Chinese literature was not just an accessory to Westernization, but a combination of West and East, thereby producing authentic, Chinese modern literature.

⁴¹³ Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, "Autobiographical Sketch" (Zixu xiaozhuan 自敘小傳), in Zhang Tianyi, *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天翼文集, vol.10 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 475-478.

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